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**PRACTICING STRATEGY: MAKING
SENSE OF THE ACTIVITIES AND
APPROACHES OF THE HR FUNCTION
IN A SRI LANKAN COMMERCIAL
BANK.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Management

at Massey University, Albany New Zealand

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2018

ABSTRACT

Human resource practitioners have increasingly gravitated towards a greater strategic positioning of their activities. However, progress towards human resource (HR) practitioner strategic integration has remained elusive.

Arguably, HR practitioners need to enact a greater strategic role within organisations, and as such, play a greater role in organisational practices and performance. This thesis reports on a case study undertaken in a Sri Lankan bank, where 65 interviews were conducted with 55 people across 6 hierarchical levels.

The research focused on understanding how the HR function, in conjunction with its organisational partners, attempts to act strategically. Specifically, the research questions were: (1) how strategic are HR practitioners in the development and implementation of practices across different business units; (2) how does strategic integration occur between HR practitioners and business units; and (3) what factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business units?

A review of the literature on organisational strategy and strategic human resource management indicates that while both fields have unique research gaps within their respective bodies of work, when refocused through a Strategy-as-Practice lens, additional gaps emerge at the cross-section of both streams of scholarship. Addressing these gaps would advance HRM and strategic management scholarship's understanding of strategy activity in the HRM context.

Findings show that there are a complex range of interconnections between external and internal contextual factors determining the extent to which HR practitioners can make a strategic contribution. Business units' contextual elements were also found to vary significantly as did the integrative frameworks of practices and activities they sought from HR practitioners. Two main factors inhibited HR practitioners from delivering on these expectations: HR practitioner identity structures, and contextual constraints including lack

of clarity in relation to the broader strategic intent. Furthermore, HR practitioners drew on patterns of previous activity when faced with ambiguity. This often involved them making more sense of ‘what being more strategic means’. This study identified contributions in relation to HR practitioners’ willingness and ability to assert agency around strategic change by interpreting cues from line managers, and thus removing them from the broader strategic expectations of the organisation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Franz Kafka remarked that “writing is utter solitude, the descent into the cold abyss of oneself”. Had it not been for the support of family, friends and colleagues, I think I would have been lost in my own introspection - with no completed thesis ever eventuating. I am therefore eternally grateful to the small army of supporters who over the years kept me motivated and intellectually stimulated while not letting me forget the importance of retaining a sense of humour.

First and foremost, my sincere love and thanks goes my beautiful, kind and incredibly patient wife. It was her playfulness that kept me going. She supported me emotionally and practically in every way possible, picking up the slack around the house or listening to me explain elements of my PhD over and over just so I could verbalize my thoughts. Second, I would like to thank my mother who endured countless hardships as a single mother to ensure I had a first-rate education. I love you dearly and appreciate everything you have done for me.

Third, without my PhD colleagues and close friends Fatima Junaid and Gary Oldcorn, this process would not have been the exciting ride that it has. We all started this journey around the same time, and you were both there for me week after week as we had our ‘PhD support club’ meetings throughout our studies. You both made this journey an enjoyable one, and I am richer for having shared it with you.

Fourth, I extend my love and thanks to my close friends Mark Constantine, Jake Preston and Josh Fuller. You were there cheering me on, helping with editing and ideas, and being there to go on a long run or a bike ride to clear my head and have a few beers with afterwards. Thank you, gentlemen!

Finally, I give my sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisors Darryl Forsyth, David Tappin, Bevan Catley, and Tony Garret. Without your guidance, friendship and motivation, I would never have made it past my confirmation. This has certainly been a journey, and keeping me going through the more difficult parts must not have been easy. You, however, made this a highly rewarding and enjoyable experience, and I am lucky to count you all as close friends at the completion of this journey. In the same respect, I am also immensely grateful to the late Professor Ralph Stablein, with whom I began this journey. His sad and unexpected passing did not allow for us to complete this thesis together; however, I am very proud to say I finished what we started. Ralph's guidance, friendship and intellectual insights were the catalyst for me pursuing an academic career, and his memory and guidance will continue to influence me throughout my career.

PUBLICATIONS

Some of the ideas of chapter 2 of this thesis have been published and presented in the following forum:

Refereed conference proceedings

Cordier, J., Catley, B., Tappin, D., & Junaid, F. (2015). *Taking People Seriously: An Activity Approach for Strategic Human Resource Management. 29th Australia and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference, Queenstown, New Zealand, 2-4 December 2015.*

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|--|
| HRF | Human Resource Function |
| HRM | Human Resource Management |
| SHRM | Strategic Human Resource Management |
| BU | Business Unit |
| BUs | Business Units |
| SAP | Strategy-as-practice. A swiftly developing body of scholarship that treats strategy as the work of ‘strategists’, rather than an activity of top management alone. It focusses on who does strategic work, particularly focusing on these actor’s micro-activities. Strategy is therefore treated as something that is done rather than something an organisation has. |
| RBV | Resource-based view of the firm |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicator |
| CEOG | Chief Executive Officer Group. A level within an organisation below that of the board of directors. It constitutes a group of senior executives who make decisions to address internal and external environmental factors. This a level where the locus of strategy formation predominately occurs. |

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Orientation

Over the past two decades human resource practitioners have increasingly gravitated towards greater strategic positioning of their activities (Ho & Teo, 2015; Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006; Marler, 2012; Truss, 2003). However, progress made towards Human Resource (HR) practitioner strategic integration has not met the prescriptive expectations of scholars. For example, some observers (e.g. Ho & Teo, 2015; Kaufman, 2012; Yeung, 2011) have argued that despite calls for HR practitioners to enact a greater strategic role within organisations (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), such calls have had limited impact on daily organisational practices.

Research has also shown the problematic nature of HR practitioners achieving strategic integration (e.g. Caldwell, 2003, 2008; Guest & King, 2004; Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Zaleska, 2002). This is a point illustrated acutely by Guest and King (2004) - in re-examining Legge's (1978) influential work on the vicious circles that have hindered HR practitioner operational effectiveness and strategic integration within the firm. Guest and King (2004) largely reaffirmed that Legge's vicious circles were still in effect - despite the passage of 25 years.

A steady flow of literature has been devoted to investigating if the prescriptive and aspirant ideals of what Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) should entail meets the empirical realities of what is occurring within organisations. Of the seven major themes identified by Lengnick-Hall et al.

(2009), a shifting focus from managing people towards developing strategic contributions most directly addresses this. One vein of work within this scholarship has shown the links between strategy and HR practices, investigating the influencing factors of performance within varied industry, country and organisational settings (e.g. Ahmad & Schroeder, 2003; Harris & Ogbonna, 2001; Huang, 2000; Khatri, 2000; Lepak, Taylor, Tekleab, Marrone, & Cohen, 2007; Nikandrou & Papalexandris, 2007; Richard & Johnson, 2001; Vlachos, 2008). Another vein has focused on human capital and strategy. This has sought to understand the strategic contributions and associated performance outcomes of HR managers themselves (Green, Wu, Whitten, & Medlin, 2006; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997).

This previous research has paid attention to human capital's effect on performance in different sectors (Hatch & Dyer, 2004; Hitt, Biermant, Shimizu, & Kochhar, 2001; Kor & Leblebici, 2005), capturing varied perceptions of performance from different organisational actors (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2005). A third vein has shown a link between social capital and strategic contributions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). Such scholarship, amongst a host of other related works within the SHRM field, have greatly advanced the understanding of the link between SHRM and performance.

Such endeavours, however, have largely treated HR practitioners in aggregate, ignoring the different interactions of individual HR practitioners with different organisational actors (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Mäkelä, Smale, & Sumelius, 2014). Caldwell (2003) argues that the significant contextual variations experienced by the Human Resource Function (HRF) leads to questions

surrounding the consistency of business partnering implementation between the HRF and their organisational *business partners*. HRM scholarship has therefore seldom accounted for the intra-firm segmentation of employees (Boxall, 2012; Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014) or business unit (BU) variation (Nishii & Wright, 2008).

In addition to this, scholarship has mostly focused on *what* practices occur, at the expense of understanding *how* they occur (Björkman et al., 2014).

Frequently, this is the result of utilising research methods that lack the intimacy to obtain more meaningful data (Jackson et al., 2014). In short, the SHRM literature to date has produced a deep and prescriptive literature base of what HR practitioners should do to be strategic, yet a far shallower understanding of how this is ‘actually’ done. Scholarship has also produced an ability to account for the conformity of top management directives to produce positive or negative performance outcomes, yet largely an inability to account for the agency of actors, and the variations that occur as HR practitioners implement HR practices.

1.2 Problem statement overview

Akin to the methodological shortcomings that SHRM’s strategic management cousins began acting upon at the turn of the millennia (see Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Whittington, 2003), SHRM has largely fallen short in accounting for the reflexive agency of HR actors as they interact with senior, middle and line managers in formulation and implementation of HR practices. This is despite it being maintained that HR practitioners should be active participants in strategy formulation and

strategy implementation, as “neither the formation nor implementation of strategies can be separated from how people are managed” (Snell, Shadur, & Wright, 2001, p.628).

My study emerges from the recognition that the extent to which HR practitioners are able to contribute to the strategic process still remains ambiguous (cf. Bowen, Galang, & Pillai, 2002; Stiles & Trevor, 2006a). Additionally, there is a limit to scholarship’s understanding of the actual actions HR practitioners carry out during strategic activities (Falk, 2015; Hope-Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005; Pritchard, 2010). Specifically, it is argued that HRM research has yet to adequately investigate how individual-level HR phenomena develops and aggregates at higher levels within organisations (Renkema, Meijerink, & Bondarouk, 2017). Given that scholarship across the SHRM, international human resource management and the HRM literature have all signified the value and importance of being *strategic* – particularly the benefits of HR achieving strategic integration with BUs (Buller, 1988; Golden & Ramanujam, 1985) - my study further explores how this actually occurs. My thesis addresses the position that little is really known about what ‘being strategic’ entails (Björkman et al., 2014) when HR practitioners and BU actors interact with one another.

1.3 Locating the thesis

With the broad research focus outlined, this section will locate my thesis within the literature to subsequently present my research questions.

Specifically, this section’s intent is to argue that the HRM *strategic integration* literature needs to attend to *strategic ambiguity, planned and*

implemented strategy, actor agency and within-firm variability. I further argue that given the need to account for these elements, *strategy-as-practice (SAP)* is a powerful lens through which to suitably address identified gaps in the literature.

1.3.1 Strategic integration

One well-established vein of literature, which addresses strategic interaction between HR practitioners and organisational actors, has investigated the degree of strategic integration between the aggregate HRF and the firm. Scholarship stemming from the work of Golden and Ramanujam (1985) and Buller (1988) – who identified different levels of BU-HRF linkages that range from administrative to strategic - has investigated these linkages across differing sectors to demonstrate the levels of strategic integration occurring between BUs and the HRF (e.g. Teo, 2000). This research has set out to identify the level of strategic integration aligned to typologies. Such scholarship has greatly increased the understanding of *what* HR practices are undertaken by practitioners, and the strength of HR practitioner integration within an array of situations. Such scholarship nonetheless largely ignores *how* this is achieved (see Sarvaiya, Eweje, and Arrowsmith (2015) for an acceptance). Typologies are able to offer a broad understanding of the areas HR practitioners engage in, but they also have a tendency to marginalise the realities that HR practitioners face, lacking a fine-grained comprehension of the complexities of actor organisational realities (Björkman et al., 2014). In terms of actions and socially situated activity, what being “more” strategic means has therefore largely eluded scholars to this point, with an

understanding of what constitutes 'strategic action' remaining somewhat vague and narrowly defined (Björkman et al., 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 2002).

1.3.1.1 Strategic partner

Difficulties understanding strategic action stem in part from the directions undertaken towards investigating strategic partnerships. It has been argued that the HRF successfully enacting the role of strategic partner represents a moving target (Björkman et al., 2014), which changes based on the relationships within the HRF itself, and with the external elements outside the function (Guest & King, 2004; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Pritchard, 2010; Watson, 2002). How different BUs frame varied aspects of their organisational strategy has implications in how strategic action is conceived. Analysis solely at the firm level is unable to capture this. Particularly, studies utilising the work of Golden and Ramanujam (1985) as a means to gauge the level of strategic integration between HRF and its partners, have not yet paid attention to the variations of strategic integration between different BUs within the same organisation. Rather, the focus has been on the identification and categorisation of the firm as a whole, across multiple firms, excluding differences between sought and actual integration levels of multiple HRF-BU partnerships within the same organisation.

1.3.2 Strategic ambiguity

Ambiguity at any level of an organisation may result in differences in how strategy is consumed and enacted, (Abdallah & Langley, 2014) vertically and horizontally. Strategic planning documents themselves have a tendency to be

ambiguous (Cohen & James, 1986; Denis, Langley, & Lozeau, 1991; Stone & Brush, 1996), with vague language stemming from negotiated processes (Stone & Brush, 1996), or as a means to mask ideological tensions within an organisation (Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010). It has been shown that strategic ambiguity can result in different organisational outcomes.

For example, Marin, Cordier, and Hameed (2016) found that different organisational units who have the same strategic objectives and have received the same explicit information, make sense of organisational realities differently. They illustrated that varied interpretive frameworks can in turn result in the development of significantly different strategic implementations (Marin et al., 2016). Stensaker and Falkenberg (2007) found that when three BUs responded to the same organisational change initiative, over time change was customised to fit the BU's context. As a result they "argue that organisational-level responses and how these develop over time can be explained by examining individuals' interpretive responses" (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007, p. 137).

The work of Human Resource Management (HRM) is inherently fraught with tension and ambiguity (Watson, 1977 as cited in Renwick, 2000), with the seminal work of Legge (1978) illustrating the creative adaptations employed by the HRF to combat diminished legitimacy and power. As a result of role ambiguity, and the subsequent *vicious* circles that removed legitimacy and power from the HRF, HR practitioners have responded to these dynamics by adopting *conformist and deviant innovator roles* (Legge, 1978). Guest and King (2004) illustrated that ambiguity and confusion still exist, even with

senior non-HR actors. They reported confusion surrounding executive management's understanding of HR practitioner responsibilities.

Rhetorical hypocrisy has also been illustrated in senior management's strategic discourse. Guest and King (2004) noted in their research that while executive managers 'talked people up' as being their 'most important asset', a sizable portion of senior managers noted that their organisation failed to treat employees as key assets. Noteworthy levels of ambiguity were found to exist around what constituted the HRF being successful in doing HRM work. The HRF was shown to be "significantly at odds with the expectations of their colleagues" (p. 416). In turn, Guest and King (2004) also reported that the HRF itself found it difficult to extrapolate its own success criteria, and accordingly where their attentions and energies should be focused.

Within strategic management scholarship, ambiguity surrounding strategies has also been shown to affect individuals in conflicting ways. Mantere (2005) found that individuals can go beyond their operative responsibilities to act as strategic champions. He observed the impact of strategic practices on enabling or disabling individual strategic champions within an organisation. It therefore may be unrealistic to think that organisations operate as highly harmonious entities, with the Queen Bee controlling the hive to meet a unified strategic objective. Accordingly, treating the actions of HR practitioners as being perfectly in sync with higher order strategic objectives may too be unrealistic. Unplanned consequences can stem from intended strategies through sensemaking processes (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Organisations may consequently also be engaged in a tug-of-war of activities, with the actions of

BUs and individuals - who are plagued by ambiguity themselves - enabling the formal and emerging expectations for some actors, yet at the same time disabling others (Mantere, 2005, 2008).

With such ambiguity, HR practitioners have faced several *tensions* surrounding their role. The first has been the balancing of disparate interests between employees and management (Caldwell, 2003; Legge, 1978; Tyson & Fell, 1986), while the second has been “tensions between expected, perceived and enacted roles, and the process of role conflict that often emerges when a person performs more than one role” (Caldwell, 2003, p. 992). Potentially compounding both tensions is the possibility for variations of expectancy between different BUs, and the personnel within these units. This could entail balancing the strategic expectations of one senior manager within a BU against those of another, and managing the strategic beliefs of a senior manager against those of their middle and line managers.

1.3.3 Planned and implemented strategy

The articulated strategy of an organisation and the realised strategy often differ (Mintzberg, 1978), with the literature noting that HR system implementations are rarely perfectly aligned with what is sought (Wright & Nishii, 2007). Practices are implemented by an array of individuals, which results in a variety of implementations (Zohar, 2000). Therefore, methodologically, when the researcher focuses on firm level analysis, they are - by design - unable to account for the contextual situations that lead to possible variability of HR practice implementation. Equally so, focusing on

any one level of analysis (i.e. senior managers alone) is unable to capture possible contextual variations adequately.

Differences between the sought and actual strategic value delivered to each BU within an organisation have been addressed by highly insightful works such as that of Guest and King (2004). Such research has shown that HR practitioners are not generally delivering the strategic value sought from senior executives. Pritchard (2010) found that as a team of HR professionals embarked on training to become strategic partners, “discussion about the work of the strategic partner employed rather ambiguous and often vague ideas about what ‘doing’ this kind of work might involve” (p.180). Such ambiguity stemmed from the HRF’s business partners themselves.

In order to further expand strategic integration scholarship, I argue the need to account for variability between BUs, ambiguity in understanding strategic documents, and differences in sought BU outcomes. This entails being open to the possibility that very different approaches can be taken by HR practitioners when dealing with different BUs. Accordingly, establishing the nature of strategic integration (both sought and actual) by employing Golden and Ramanujam’s (1985) model across varied BU’s – rather than to the firm as a whole, as done to date – may offer a better understanding of the contextual dynamics that impact formulation and implementation. Approaches towards quantitative research have been argued to oversimplify the complexity of HR systems in measurement, not accounting for the interdependence of such systems (Jackson et al., 2014).

1.3.4 Within-firm variability

Accepting the interdependence of strategic formulation and implementation necessitates systems-thinking (Jackson et al., 2014), as exhibited by the early SHRM work that viewed HRM as a dynamic relationship between HR systems and internal and external environments (e.g. Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1984; Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984). Yet despite this, there remains a dearth of literature incorporating the integrated contextual environments found within these systems (Jackson et al., 2014). Addressing this, a compelling argument has recently emerged that advancements have been hindered by a lack of understanding regarding the implementation of HRM practices. Central to this position is the methodological concern that research thus far has largely been unable to address variations of implementation across multiple levels of analysis (see Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Renkema, Meijerink, & Bondarouk, 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2014; Wright & Nishii, 2013). A possible solution to this situation would entail capturing the positive and negative creative actor responses to implementation that result in deviations from top management's intentions - if top management does in fact have a uniform approach.

Calls from within the scholarship have accordingly encouraged scholars to "more fully address the concerns of multiple stakeholders" (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 1). Both Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) and Wright and Nishi (2008, 2013) have taken a central role in arguing the dangers of ignoring within-firm practices of HRM. They note that most SHRM research has essentially done this, and this increases the likelihood of producing misleading results, with the

interaction of HR practitioners and wider organisational stakeholders also remaining somewhat obscure. SHRM has largely seen HR practices as being set by senior managers with the desire to facilitate outcomes with other actors down-the-line implementing these practices somewhat faithfully (Pérez, 2012).

However, actual HR implementations may differ from intended ones (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Truss & Gratton, 1994; Wright, McMahan, & McWilliams, 1994), or elicit unintended responses (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013). Therefore, a need exists to “give fuller consideration to sources of variability” (Wright & Nishii, 2007, p.277) while also providing finer grained explanations of how these processes are enacted (see Woodrow & Guest, 2014). For this thesis, I consequently argue the necessity to not only contrast the sought and actual activities between BU and HR practitioners, but also between HR practitioners and middle and line managers. This then necessitates identification of the sources of any activity variation, accounting for external environment factors (Renkema et al., 2016), as well as HR practices and activities that mediate structure and agency within interactions and business-partnership relationships. The outcome of attending to these factors allows insights into how HR practices both shape and are shaped by activity – something that SAP scholars have also sought to achieve (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) when addressing gaps within the strategic management literature.

1.3.5 Viewing SHRM within a strategy-as-practice lens

The points discussed in the previous sections - while directed at a SHRM audience - in many respects echo criticisms by SAP scholars that emerged just before the turn of the millennium in the strategic management literature (e.g. Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 1996, 2006, 2007, 2014). The subsequent work within the domain of SAP has advanced the strategic management literature by attending to the situated strategic activity of strategic actors – being concerned with the *doing of strategy* (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). For example, Vaara and Whittington (2012) argue for the value of SAP for its “focus on organisational and institutional practices that enable or constrain action; emphasis on practices as mediating between structure and agency; [and addressing] how institutionalised practices are both shapers and outcomes of activity” (p. 319).

This has been done by paying attention to the practitioners, practices and the praxis involved in the everyday activities of strategic activity. Practices refer to “routinized types of behaviour” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249) that actors employ while they are strategising. Explanations of praxis cover “the concrete, unfolding activity as it takes place” (Suddaby, Seidl, & Lê, 2013, p. 332). Mantere (2005) notes that the power of the SAP “paradigm lies between organisational macro structures and the individual activities, in the practices (routines, tools, techniques etc.) that enable and constrain activity, and which in turn are reproduced in micro-activity” (p. 158).

SAP treats the creation and implementation of strategy holistically (Whittington, 1996). Whilst the varied agendas attached to this premise have been pursued for some time now within the SAP literature, such an approach has only been addressed in fragments within the SHRM literature (Jackson et al., 2014), and only comprehensively put forward recently in an agenda by Björkman et al. (2014). SAP views strategy as the work undertaken by strategists, and therefore pays due attention to the numerous daily practices undertaken in the doing of daily strategic work (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003a; Mantere, 2005; Whittington, 1996, 2003).

Work done with the rapidly growing body of SAP literature provides a means to understand varied perspectives of what strategic activity entails. SAP, when focused towards the strategic activities of HRM, or HRM-as-practice as coined by Björkman et al. (2014), enables the emergence of what can often be considered ‘mundane’, yet strategically relevant activity. This can potentially occur across multiple levels within an organisation – not just at the senior management level alone. SAP itself draws from theoretically rich and well-established bodies of literature that focus on the subtle strategic activity across organisations, and the implications of practices, praxis and practitioners set within organisational contexts.

Yet, while SAP has rapidly emerged to offer an understanding of strategic action, with a host of theoretical and practical implications, strangely, SAP scholars have themselves neglected to address the intersection of strategy and HRM practices. Recently, an article from Björkman et al. (2014) put forward a comprehensive agenda for HRM to embrace SAP as a means to bridge the

divide between work being done in strategic management, HRM, and SHRM scholarship. The central theme to this agenda is that a SAP approach is ideally suited to answer many of SHRM and HR role theory's unanswered questions, and accordingly address many of the gaps illustrated thus far in my introduction chapter. More generally, organisational studies and management scholarship have started to embrace the wider '*practice turn*' across a host of domains (such research is discussed in Chapter 2). The practice turn represents the rise of social theory that looks to balance 'individualism' and 'societism' (Schatzki, 2005; Whittington, 2006) - therefore respecting "both the efforts of individual actors and the workings of the social" (Whittington, 2006, p. 614).

SAP arose in part because of the dissatisfaction with traditional strategy literature, which was focused on firm and field level quantitative analysis that was directed towards performance; arguably excluding the *people* who do strategy, and their subsequent daily actions (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Johnson et al. (2007) note that traditional strategic management studies purport to look at the internal elements aligned to the resource-based view of the firm. Yet, within such work there is a noticeable absence of people and their actions. Priem and Butler (2001) argue that the resource based view is inhibited by a high degree of abstraction which does little to inform managers about how they could employ and utilise these variables for positive outcomes (Ambrosini, Bowman, & Burton-Taylor, 2007).

Within SHRM, one of the central tenets is the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991). This purports HRM's worth is found in the implementation of a given strategic choice, as well as the cultivation of people as a means to

achieve competitive advantage (Boxall, 1996). However, SHRM has focused less on implementation and more on understanding the HRM performance link in the cultivation of employees (Khilji & Wang, 2006) - known as the *black box* problem (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Purcell, 2003). Despite strategic implementation itself acting as a source of competitive advantage, and the quality of HR implementation being found to act as a mediating factor of firm performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006), SHRM research has paid scant attention towards addressing the actions behind the process of formulation and implementation - the 'process behind the process' (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Nor has it paid attention to the actual engagement mechanism employed between SHRM stakeholders (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007) and how these interactions continue to reshape organisational life.

These weaknesses, in relation to understanding within-firm variability (Woodrow & Guest, 2014; Wright & Nishii, 2013) is something SAP scholarship has been successful at attending to. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) contrast SAP scholarship with the traditional strategic management literature by pointing out that "[t]hose studies that do incorporate individuals focus primarily on top managers, as if only one elite group could act strategically" (p. 69). SAP is ideally suited to understand differing social and cognitive variations, while also being capable of capturing differences between intended and actual implementation activity. Employing SAP as a means to complement traditional strategy literature, studies such as Ambrosini et al. (2007) have been effective at using SAP to focus on micro-level activities that

determine strategic competence through fine grained analysis – particularly with an eye towards contributions to the resource-based view.

1.3.5.1 Individual agency

Something SAP has also been very successful at is analysing the agency of actors. SAP takes a holistic position, “embracing duality, not dualism, in the relationship of the individual and collective” (Jarzabkowski, 2000, p. 13). Giddens (1984) and his theory of structuration argues that socially constructed systems are produced and reproduced through the daily actions of people within them. Such individuals are accordingly constrained and enabled by their socially created reality. Therefore, actors are influenced by their reality, but also exercise influence or agency upon their reality. From such a perspective, one’s actions intertwine into the entire strategy-making schema (Whittington, 1996). Positions of mutuality between structure and agency drawn from Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1990) are foundational theoretical resources employed within SAP work (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

SHRM research, focusing on the aggregate HRF, has largely been unable to account for the individual agency of actors (Björkman et al., 2014). This has come at the neglect of the varied individual positions of actors that make up the HRF, and how these actors address and balance a broad array of conflicting concerns across an assorted cross-section of stakeholders (Jackson et al., 2014). It is individual HR actors that deal with individual BU actors daily, with the potential for variance in these daily approaches towards engagement being very high. Beyond the HRF, BUs have also been treated homogeneously, with scholarship failing to account for their BU’s varied

positions and priorities, or the agency of actors within BUs. Jackson et al. (2014) have observed that empirical studies “almost never examine the multiple HRM systems that co-exist in organisation” (p. 31) in which there has been an egregious lack of consideration for the segmentation of employees. Put another way, some employees represent highly sought after talent and live in a different plane of reality than others within the same firm (Jackson et al., 2014).

As earlier discussed, scholarship has also tended to favour the perceptions of top management over other actors, or viewed distinctive groups of participants (senior, middle and line managers and employees) in isolation from one another (see Guest, 2011; Wright & Nishii, 2013). In doing so this has ignored the varied positions of different HRM members and their agency. Such studies have arguably failed to account for the reflexivity of actions down the line in the strategic process. Strategy is shaped by individuals, their experiences and who they are, as well as the practices they draw upon (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). Accordingly, as actors utilise their agency, varied and different outcomes can be witnessed down the line. Formulation and implementation are therefore inherently linked (Snell et al., 2001). As such, under a SAP lens, different forms of strategic integration (that may vary between different BUs) are able to be observed.

1.4 Research framework

My thesis is enabled by a research framework that uses a SAP lens to attend to multi-level actor analysis, the segmentation of different employee groups, and the agency of these actors. As discussed in the previous section, all four of

these areas have largely been neglected by SHRM literature. This section briefly discusses these four elements of my research framework as the basis for providing my research objectives in the subsequent section.

SAP as a lens for my thesis answers the general methodological calls for improved research methods within HRM scholarship (Björkman et al., 2014; Boxall, 2012, 2014; Renkema et al., 2016, 2017) through a finer-grained understanding of HR phenomena (Björkman et al., 2014). Boxall (2014) expresses the merit of looking “behind the veil of practices” (p. 583) to see how policies are perceived, interpreted and enacted. He notes that methodologically this requires going beyond counting practices. It necessitates deep “probing beneath them to assess the underlying psychological and social process” (p. 6). Sensemaking (Weick, 1988) and sensegiving (Balogun, Bartunek, & Do, 2015; Balogun & Johnson, 2004) constitute a theoretical means to address this within an HR multivariate analysis (Renkema et al., 2016), as does a broader practice perspective (Björkman et al., 2014).

A SAP lens has been argued to deliver the sought intimacy of understanding called for within recent HRM agendas (see Björkman et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2014). A SAP lens methodologically equips my work with the ability to unpack the interactions of the HRM function – both between themselves and with their organisational partners, formally and informally, in the formulation and implementation of HR practices, across multiple levels of analysis, into “smaller, more digestible, graspable realities” (Niemi, 2010, p. 11).

My thesis also has a multi-level organisational focus. Within HRM empirical studies, almost all research investigating HR systems has been done by

looking at one level of analysis (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Wright & Nishii, 2013) – i.e. senior managers alone. A recent special issue edited by Shipton, Budhwar, Sparrow, and Brown (2017) has certainly advanced this neglect, yet attention to multi-level investigation in HRM is still nascent. My analysis occurs across multiple levels of the organisation, capturing formulation, implementation and employee perceptions of practices.

My thesis therefore attends to the dangers of focusing on one level of analysis while simultaneously ignoring other levels. Looking at only one or two levels of analysis within a single study – particularly senior managers alone – has the potential to allow for misleading findings (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Senior, middle and line managers all have different perceptions of HR practices, while there is also a high likelihood that praxis between different HR and non-HR actor pairings varies. HR practitioners can utilise their own agency in the daily doing of HR work, while the HRF's business partners can also do the same. These may not align to what was intended when practices were created.

My research framework also considers intra-unit and employee group variability. In this thesis I account for the variability of strategic integration and action with HR practitioners amongst different BUs within the same firm. Extant research has largely viewed the firm as a whole with the HRF's interaction with BUs therefore mostly being treated as homogeneous; yet, “[o]rganisations are not nearly as homogeneous as the nature of our [HRM field's] research would suggest” (Colakoglu, Lepak, & Hong, 2006, p. 210).

The same is true for within-firm segmentation of employees, which has been largely absent from the literature (Jackson et al., 2014). While it has been

shown that within organisations, the contributions of different categories of employees diverge (Huselid, Beatty, & Becker, 2005; Lepak & Snell, 1999b), how these differences are accounted for in day-to-day HR practitioner strategic and operational work has yet to be illuminated.

1.4.1 Actor agency

By including collective and individual actors within my framework, my research can investigate their agency. If organisations have multiple HR components within and across BUs, and these varied configurations of components have the potential to lead to multiple and varied outcomes, the agency of individuals as well as aggregate actions should be accounted for. This however has not yet been extensively investigated, with little attention afforded to the impacts of HR practitioner agency (Björkman et al., 2014; Hope-Hailey et al., 2005; Wright & McMahan, 2011).

Since the 1970's the strategy process literature has articulated the position that social reality is not static. Rather, it is dynamic, constructed and recreated through collective and individual human agents (cf. Pettigrew, 1992). Within the broader strategic management literature, work on human agency has continued to grow - further fuelled by research showing the impact of non-senior managers on strategy process (Mantere, 2008). My work empirically attends to a dearth of enquiry surrounding actor agency dynamics between HR practitioners and BUs.

1.5 Research objectives

A core element of SAP is understanding what practitioners actually do (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, & Seidl, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003b) – this also is the central focus of my thesis. My research pays particular attention to the interrelations between practices, praxis and practitioners as HR practitioners engage strategically across different BUs.

Practitioners of strategy are the internal (employees of an organisation) and external actors (e.g. consultants, trade unions, chambers of commerce, regulators and other interest groups) that interpret change and enact strategy through praxis (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). This research therefore strives for a fine-grained understanding, not only of the often hard to distinguish line between strategic and non-strategic activity (Truss et al., 2002), but HR practitioner actions. Within this thesis, HR practitioner actions are viewed through their own situated context. Accordingly, this research is guided and operationalised by the research questions illustrated in subsection 1.5.1.

1.5.1 Research questions

1: How strategic are HR practitioners in the development & implementation of practices across different business units?

2a: How does strategic integration occur between HR practitioners and business units?

2b: What factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business units?

1.6 Research approach

My research has been undertaken from an interpretivist position that resulted in a “linear but interactive process” (Yin, 2014) of initially planning a means to address my broad research questions, then accounting for a back and forth evolution of my design and field work as issues presented themselves during the collection and analysis of data. My research was based upon the philosophy that reality is experienced subjectively, both socially and physically, with reality being socially constructed as opposed to objectively determined (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001).

I utilised a single case study to undertake my research within the setting of a large Sri Lankan commercial bank. This case was carefully chosen from eight large organisations of which I had access. This case organisation was selected over other options not only for the value placed on human capital in the banking sector in general, but the corporate culture of this bank in particular. The organisational culture within this bank was articulated within its annual reports as highly employee-centric, with such a position being a principle foundation for its renowned customer service orientation. Additionally, banking heavily relies not only on financial capital, but varied levels of highly skilled to skilled human capital (Balkin & Bannister, 1993). From a resource dependency perspective, a bank teller, for example, could be seen as in a crucial position as they control the relationship with the customer (Balkin & Bannister, 1993; Eisenhardt, 1988). Accordingly, this bank offered an ability to investigate possible tensions between practices directed at different employee segments.

Furthermore, this bank had undertaken significant restructuring and strategic changes since the global financial crisis in which many human capital elements played a key role in the bank. Institutional access was obtained through my own personal network, which helped me to move more towards close-with relationships (Johnson, Balogun, & Beech, 2010). This is argued to be a highly effective means of being able to see “behind the curtain” of organisational and actor workings (Johnson et al., 2010), while also offering a greater means to “look behind veil of [HR] practices” (Boxall, 2014, p. 6).

As a part of my research I interviewed participants from within the bank’s extensive branch network, the bank’s eight major BUs, as well as HR practitioners from the HRF. This included interviews with senior managers from each BU, middle managers and line managers, and employees from across the bank. This constituted 53 participants, with a total of 64 interviews taking place across the organisation.

I used an inductive qualitative approach towards my research. I employed stratified thematic sampling within a single embedded case context, relying primarily on interviews that were supported by observation and documentation. The merits of using a single embedded case design allowed for my research to make use of multiple levels of analysis while largely keeping field level and organisational level contextual issues constant and stable. A single embedded case study is ideally suited to support multiple methods and multiple constituents in SHRM, potentially offering significant methodological value (Truss et al., 2002; Ulrich, 1996; Wright, McMahan, Snell, & Gerhart, 2001).

1.7 Research contributions

Despite the progress made towards HRM scholarship by HR role theory and SHRM streams of literature, both have remained somewhat insulated from one another (Björkman et al., 2014). The bridging of these two streams, as done in my thesis, offers a means to link performance outcomes to actor-centric realities (Björkman et al., 2014). The former has been addressed within SHRM scholarship, but seldom in HR role theory, and vice versa for the latter (Björkman et al., 2014). Accordingly, while this thesis represents a single case, it was designed with the intention to make a number of original contributions towards theory, practice and methodology using a SAP lens. This thesis seeks to make methodological, theoretical and practical contributions. Contributions to methodology are sought by using SAP, attending to multiple levels of analysis, and using micro perspectives of actors that incorporate actor-agency into analysis. Enabled by my methodology, my research seeks to theoretically contribute to the identification of different notions of being strategic between levels of organisational personnel (executive, senior, middle, and line managers and employees) as well as to understand how different HR practices are directed at different employee segments. My contributions to practice entail reducing abstraction for managers of actual HR practices that are included within the resource based view of the firm and providing a clearer understanding of how HR managers can employ these.

1.8 Overview of the thesis structure

The structure and flow of my thesis is presented within this section. Chapter 2 starts by reviewing the SAP literature to frame the subsequent sections of

Chapter 2. I then undertake a literature review on HR role theory before illustrating an evolution of the SHRM literature to develop and justify the research questions of my thesis. Chapter 3 then illustrates the methods of this study. It offers a detailed overview of all the elements of my study, starting with how the selection of my case organisation was undertaken. The methods chapter then illustrates how I dealt with access, as well as with mitigation strategies to common traps of single case inductive studies. It also covers elements such as the strata of my interviews, the reasons why a single case was employed, and the waves of data I collected.

Chapter 4 looks at the extra-organisational contextual factors that have a bearing on my case organisation's internal BU-HRF dynamics. As I will articulate in chapter 2, context has a significant bearing on organisational interactions and notions of how strategic integration should and does occur. Therefore, this chapter is inherently intertwined with my findings chapters, and offers an overview of contextually relevant extra-organisational and intra-firm identified elements that link to my findings. Chapters 5 and 6 report the findings from my data analysis. Chapter 5 addresses research question one (R1), while Chapter 6 addresses both parts of research question two (R2a and R2b.) My thesis then finishes with Chapter 7, which presents the conclusions and limitations of my research.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to review and then critically assess relevant literature surrounding the strategic actions of HR practitioners and their strategic interactions with BU organisational actors. The review covers SAP, HR role theory, and SHRM literature. HR role theory has illustrated the different roles that the HRF has undertaken when doing HRM work (Barney & Wright, 1997; Storey, 1992; Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), while parallel to this (Björkman et al., 2014), SHRM scholarship has been devoted to understanding HRM's part in supporting strategy (Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001).

However, as discussed in Chapter 1, these “two streams of literature remain relatively isolated from each other” (Björkman et al., 2014, p. 123), particularly in relation to understanding what HR practitioners actually do to act strategically. Work by Welch and Welch (2012), investigating what HR practitioners do, “suggest[s] that the operational/strategic divide [reported within the literature] is potentially misleading” (p. 615). Understanding the actual actions of strategically relevant actors is, however, something that the SAP literature has sought to address (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson et al., 2003b).

My literature review will therefore illustrate that while HR role theory and SHRM research both have unique research gaps within their respective bodies of work, when refocused through a SAP lens, additional gaps emerge at the cross-section of both streams of scholarship that would advance HRM and

strategic management scholarship's understanding of strategy activity in the HRM context (cf. Björkman et al., 2014).

2.2 Chapter objectives

This chapter is broken down into two distinct parts. The first part reviews relevant literature (2.3-2.5), while the second part takes a critical position towards some elements of the literature (2.6-2.11). I begin section 2.3 of this chapter by addressing strategy-as-practice (SAP). This section articulates the core premise of SAP so that my subsequent discussion/critique of the HR role theory and SHRM literature may draw upon a SAP lens. It discusses the core positions SAP takes, the drivers of its rapid emergence, and common theoretical frameworks employed in SAP research.

With SAP's foundational perspectives in hand, I then move to section 2.4, where I predominantly look at HR role theory, reviewing literature surrounding the transition of roles by the HRF, the history of HR roles and the evolution of such roles. I then outline research that focuses on understanding who the HRF has had strategic interaction with, and what the results of such engagements have been. I then illustrate the strategic competencies the HRF has pursued, and the drivers of such pursuits. Finally, I present the prescriptive and empirical typologies of the HRF that have emerged, before concluding this section.

Within section 2.5, I review scholarship that has been undertaken in the field of SHRM, and the outcomes of this scholarship. This section begins by briefly reviewing the emergence of SHRM before then reviewing the vein of SHRM literature that focuses on strategic integration.

Part two of this chapter provides a focused critical assessment of the literature discussed in the previous sections. It is structured around the four identified elements of my research framework - (1) the need for additional research methods; (2) the analysis of multiple stakeholders at multiple levels of analysis to account for the variability of strategic practices and creative adaption occurring; (3) variability of strategic integration between different business units and intrafirm-segmentation of employees; and (4) strategic agency affecting strategic outcomes. Sections 2.6 – 2.10 have the objective of illustrating the elements outlined below, while my final section of this chapter (2.11) presents my research questions.

PART 1 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.3 A strategy-as-practice ‘lens’

2.3.1 Introduction to strategy-as-practice (SAP)

The field of SAP has experienced rapid growth (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009) since its emergence in the mid-1990s. From the first article published in the journal Long Range Planning by Richard Whittington (1996), SAP has gone from its nascent beginnings to attracting significant scholarly participation. The expansion of the SAP field has occurred to the extent that SAP now has its own interest group (strategising activities and practices) within the Academy of Management. The theoretical antecedents of the field of SAP can be traced back to both early management and French social theories. SAP draws heavily from strategic management’s strategy process literature, as well as the social theories of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) and structuration (Giddens, 1984).

As it will become apparent in the critical review sections found in the second half of this chapter, what SAP sets out to achieve is tightly focused on addressing weaknesses and gaps within the broader HRM literature. Critical positions of HRM scholarship are therefore largely accounted for within a SAP perspective. In many cases where critical HRM scholarship has expressed concern towards the methodological or theoretical direction of HRM, SAP scholarship itself has advanced to mature states within these areas. Directions put forward by HRM scholars to progress HRM research therefore increasingly resemble those calls that were made in critical strategic management scholarship and subsequently gave rise to the emergence and proliferation of SAP.

In this section, I first articulate the direction traditional strategic management literature was taking before critical scholarship sought alternative, but ultimately, complementary directions that resulted in the formation and growth of SAP (section 2.3.2). I then provide the core concepts supporting theories found within SAP (2.3.3). I provide the framework that addresses the nexus of practitioners, practices, and praxis - employed within the SAP field (2.3.3.2), as well as the conceptual levels of analysis for strategic activity (2.3.3.3). Finally, in section 2.3.4 I provide a cross-section of SAP empirical scholarship, to illustrate progress and the breadth of research within the field.

2.3.2 The emergence of SAP

A central element of SAP is understanding what practitioners of strategy *actually do* (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Hambrick, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson et al., 2003a). As Johnson et al. (2003a) note, this “constitute[s] the

day-to-day activities of organisational life *and* which relate to strategic outcomes. [The] focus therefore is on micro-activities that, while often invisible to traditional strategy research, nevertheless can have significant consequences for organisations and those that work in them” (p. 3). The concern for the micro, is however, not at the exclusion of the macro. Rather, SAP seeks to complement areas that traditional strategic management scholarship has been unable to answer (cf. Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008b; Whittington, 2006).

2.3.2.1 Concerns in relation to ‘traditional’ perspectives of strategy

Strategy has traditionally been viewed as the property of an organisation; this frames strategy as something a firm has, rather than something it does (Whittington, 2006). Yet, unease with the dominance of this macro strategic management view brought about criticisms of strategic management’s direction. Arguments emerged that the strategic management literature suffered from high degrees of abstraction. This was then compounded with scholars increasingly undertaking more sophisticated quantitative analysis of these abstractions (Johnson et al., 2003a). As a result, critical scholars saw the direction of traditional strategic management as working towards a theoretical cul-de-sac (Johnson et al., 2003a). This subsequently, and ultimately gave rise to SAP. The reasons for the rise of SAP are of significance for this thesis - as I will later articulate in sections 2.6-2.10, my work addresses a growing body of criticism towards elements of SHRM that mirror the position of those who formed and cultivated the field of SAP.

In regards to the concerns of treating strategy as something an organisation has, inattention towards human beings was the principle motivation of disquiet (cf. Hambrick, 2004). Strategy research, after the highly successful influences of Michael Porter, typically became macro-economically orientated (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). As a result, work reflecting the importance of human beings within strategic management scholarship greatly diminished (Bettis, 1991; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Lowendahl & Revang, 1998; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2002; Whittington, 2003). Omissions of people and their actions in macro strategic scholarship were even noted to plague theories such as the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) – a core strategic management theory. The significance of this is that this theory is meant to account for the internal subtleties of people's actions as a means to achieve competitive advantage (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003b). Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) observed that, even in work that did include actors within the organisation, the focus had been very much on senior managers. They further commented on the unlikelihood of a small group of *super agents* (in this case senior managers) sitting in a room pulling all the strategic strings, while no one else in the organisation acted strategically.

2.3.2.2 SAP complementing traditional strategic management scholarship

A rising dissatisfaction with traditional macro-economic approaches within strategic management scholarship was also a strong catalyst for the emergence of SAP. Specifically, this entailed concern with traditional strategic management scholarship looking at multivariate effects on firm performance, yet omitting human actors and their actions (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

With the broader ‘practice turn’ in social theory garnering impetus in the 1980s (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), SAP drew from the theoretical positions of this work (Whittington, 2006).

Influential practice scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, and Anthony Giddens, all generally shared a desire to move beyond *dualism* (Whittington, 2006). Whittington (2006) uses Schatzki’s (2005) terms of *individualism* and *societism* to shed light on dualism.

In this view, individualists attribute too much to individual human actors, neglecting macro phenomena, while societists are over-impressed by large social forces, forgetting the micro. Practice theorists aim to respect both the efforts of individual actors and the workings of the social. To the individualists, they insist there is such a thing as society; to the societists, they affirm the significance of individual activity (Whittington, 2006, p. 614).

2.3.2.3 SAP’s rejection of false dichotomies

SAP therefore is accepting of macro and micro levels of analysis. While SAP was formed as a means to balance the runaway dominance of the macro perspective, it was not moulded in opposition to it. Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008b), for example, have articulated the place for both practice and economic positions within management education. They advocate the dangers of embracing false dichotomies. They reject the notion that one must choose. They use an article titled “Dirty Hands ‘versus’ Clean Models” by Hirsch, Michaels, and Friedman (1987) to emphasise this point. It is argued that on the one hand sociological research is messy, as is reality itself. Such research can be plagued with contextual issues. On the other hand, economic theory makes for clean models - yet such models are highly prone to abstractions.

Indeed, Langley (1999) notes that in strategy process scholarship, choosing to jump in and draw out theory, starting at the foundations and moving upwards (Pettigrew, 1992; Van de Ven, 1992), is inherently messy. Yet, the philosophy behind doing so is to seek to accurately comprehend how and why events occur over time (Langley, 1999). To do so, these events must be observed directly (Mintzberg, 1979).

In rejecting this false dichotomy, and seeking to fill the void that macro-economic strategic research is unable to resolve, SAP as a field can be seen to embrace a common sense approach to organisation (Björkman et al., 2014).

Just as common sense depicts that strategy is broader and deeper than the workings of few senior managers alone, the practice of strategy places emphases on “the common-sensical notion of practical activity and direct experience” (Orlikowski, Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010, p. 24).

Importantly however, this is not just a list of what people do, or anecdotal management experiences barren of theory - a concern Grant (2016) has towards practically informed positions (cf. Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008b). A quick review of the field will highlight that SAP draws upon diverse social and managerial theories within its agenda.

2.3.3 SAP Frameworks

A cross-section of SAP research is illustrated within subsection 2.3.4. These are based on several social theories and frameworks that are used within SAP scholarship. What SAP ultimately does is afford greater attention to people and their actions. It focuses on the micro activities of people (beyond those of senior managers alone). It then accounts for these elements with larger social

structures. While doing this, it also is orientated towards the employment and creation of theories that explain the intersection of practitioners and their activity, given one's socially situated context. SAP therefore directly addresses context while also focusing on the practices and praxis of practitioners within these contexts.

2.3.3.1 SAP and context

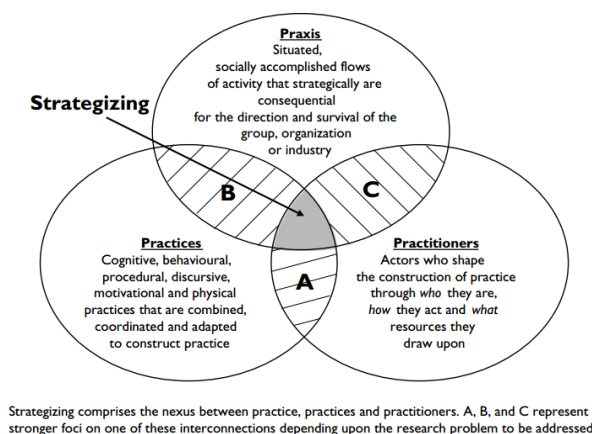
Context is reflected in Jarzabkowski et al. (2007)'s definition of SAP "as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises of those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that then draw upon in accomplishing that activity" (p. 6). The authors here draw upon the earlier work of Jarzabkowski (2005) to develop this definition, with it arguably being the definitively employed characterisation. Beyond SAP's definition, two additional elements have been critical to the SAP scholarship being undertaken. The first of these is the interpretive framework for strategy practice (practitioners, practices, and praxis), while the second is the levels of analysis from which to view the 'doing of strategy'. The former is a framework from which to understand how strategic activity takes place, while the latter is a categorisation of where one may find such strategic activities taking place - between whom.

2.3.3.2 Practices, praxis and practitioners

Regarding the first of the two critical elements mentioned above, the interpretive frameworks of SAP are accompanied by three terms that are synonymous with the field. These are practices, praxis and practitioners. These three areas present an intersection in which a significant amount of SAP

attention is directed. With Whittington (2006) proposing these three elements as an integrative framework, these discrete and interconnected concepts have since become central to SAP at different analytical levels (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Figure 2.1 shows the interconnection of these three elements in which practices, praxis and practices intersect with each other to provide opportunity for scholarly investigation.

Figure 2.1: A conceptual framework for analysing strategy-as-practice



Taken from Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009)

Strategising is an activity that entails the doing of strategy, and it occurs through the actions of people (Hambrick, 2004; Jarzabkowski, 2004). People (practitioners) utilise tangible and intangible resources (categorised as practices) in the undertaking of their daily activities (praxis). Marin et al. (2016) articulate the interconnection of these three elements:

Practices refer to “routinized types of behaviour” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249) that actors use while they are strategizing. Explanations of praxis cover “the concrete, unfolding activity as it takes place” (Suddaby et al., 2013, p. 332). Practitioners of strategy are the internal and external actors that interpret change and enact strategy through praxis (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Practices

It is important to note that *practices* viewed through SAP go beyond how they are predominantly conceived in HRM scholarship. HR practices have largely been seen as practices put in place by top management as a means to achieve an end goal (Pérez, 2012). Such a position, however, inherently creates a divide between intended design and unintended outcomes of these practices, whereas practices that do not conform to the intended design are either made immaterial, or more detrimentally, are regarded as negatively impacting the value of such HRM practices (Pérez, 2012).

Within SAP however, practices also incorporate the tools and resources that extend beyond tangible elements or intended outcomes. While desired elements are included, so too are social and symbolic resources (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). These are derived from both theory and practice, and represent the “everyday lexicon and activity of strategy” (p. 283), that include for example: SWOT analysis, technology tools, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008b). The work of strategy therefore incorporates material tools as well intangible resources, such as discursive, cognitive and behavioural practices that are inclusive of what organisational actors do to create outcomes (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) - with the focus on activity.

Praxis

As the resources discussed above are employed in the doing of strategic work, they are utilised in the socially situated day-to-day activities of *praxis*. Every day, actions occur in the doing of strategic work. Meetings occur, forms are

filled in, and presentations delivered (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008a).

The doing of these actions constitutes praxis.

While these may seem very mundane, these actions are socially situated, meaning, that while the actions are indeed micro activities, they are accompanied with significant meaning. As praxis is undertaken, it is embedded with organisational culture and sub-cultures. Certainly macro explanations can shape praxis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), such as larger picture elements of organisational objectives, but they are also driven by the agency of actors, and the way these actors interpret their social reality. As praxis is a socially situated activity undertaken by people, practitioners accordingly make up the third element of the SAP conceptual framework triad.

In respect to the differences between practices and praxis, earlier criticisms of SAP have called for better definitions (e.g. Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008). Particularly, it has been acknowledged that it is difficult to isolate an individual practice from the broader connection of practices occurring within an organisation (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Thus, a key position to emerge from such critiques has been to articulate that practices are the resources that practitioners draw upon, while praxis focuses on the activities occurring as strategic work is undertaken. Put another way by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), “practices [are] the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done, [while praxis entails] the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished” (p. 70).

Practitioners

Practitioners are those people involved in the doing of strategic work that bring within them all the idiosyncrasies of being human (Björkman et al., 2014). Accordingly, accepting that human beings come with human attributes, means practitioners come not only with situated and personal knowledge and skills, but with agency (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007). As already articulated in my introduction, practitioners framed from an SAP position are conceived more broadly than in SHRM. In a review of the work undertaken within SAP, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) employ the words of Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008a) as a representative definition:

Strategy's practitioners are defined widely, to include both those directly involved in making strategy – most prominently managers and consultants – and those with indirect influence – the policy-makers, the media, the gurus and the business schools who shape legitimate praxis and practices (p. 101).

2.3.3.3 SAP and levels of analysis

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) further add to the above definition by observing that empirical studies allude to aggregate groups of practitioners in addition to individuals. Indeed, the convention of SAP scholarship now is the inclusion of both. This was derived from their review of levels of analysis being undertaken in SAP, and represents the second critical element - noted earlier – within SAP. This is a typology of practitioner and level of praxis. Figure 2.2 illustrates the levels of analysis undertaken. It demonstrates vertically the level of analysis while horizontally it illustrates the actor categories being investigated.

SAP is attentive to both organisational aggregate and individual actors, as well as extra-organisational aggregate actors. It views these actors undertaking praxis at the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) offer an extensive overview of research directed towards these areas with some exemplars of such categories. I have drawn from their work to highlight such positions and suitable examples of the work occurring within these areas of analysis.

The micro-level of analysis at the individual level (intersection A) would be concerned with individual actions proximal to their experiences (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Given as an example, is the work of Mantere (2005, 2008), who shows how individuals interpret strategy, their role towards it, and accordingly the praxis that comes about as a result of this interpretation. This work also investigated the praxis of individual actors who did not have a formal strategic role. The meso level (intersections B, E, H) is concerned with the organisational and sub organisational level. Studies here, for example, have been interested in understanding how the actions of individuals influence firm strategy (Rouleau, 2005). This also includes how individuals shape the actions of sub-organisational groups, such as business units, and the strategic implication of such (e.g. Marin et al., 2016; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007). Macro-praxis (intersection C, F, I) is focused towards the interaction of individual actions influencing or being influenced by larger macro forces, such as institutions, markets and industries (Vaara, Kleymann, & Seristö, 2004).

Figure 2.2: Typology of practitioner and practice

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|---|--|---|
| Level of Praxis | <i>Macro</i> | C | F | I |
| | <i>Meso</i> | B | E | H |
| | <i>Micro</i> | A | D | G |
| | | <i>Individual actor within organisation</i> | <i>Aggregate actor within organisation</i> | <i>Extra organisational aggregate actor</i> |
| Type of Practitioner | | | | |

Adapted from Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009)

2.3.4 Cross-section of SAP contributions

Stemming from the frameworks discussed above, SAP has made a broad array of contributions towards strategic management scholarship. SAP work has covered a range of pursuits surrounding dynamic capabilities theory, which include understanding how strategies emerge from the centre and the periphery (Regnér, 2003) as a way of understanding the actual actions undertaken by team members that lead to competitive advantage (Ambrosini et al., 2007), among others (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003a).

Scholarship has also detailed the role that both people and inanimate objects play in strategy. In the case of the former, research has reported where strategic influence occurs, identifying those actors beyond senior managers that have significant influence upon strategic processes (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). SAP research has investigated the role strategic tools and artefacts play in strategy formulation (Jarzabkowski, Paul Spee, & Smets, 2013; Kaplan, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). For example, the role of PowerPoint

slides being used in strategy sessions (Kaplan, 2011) has illuminated understanding of how everyday tools carry, shape, and reinforce stakeholder ownership within a strategic domain.

Studies have also detailed the influence of situational context in the shaping and forming of strategic practices, with the role of sensemaking (Weick, 1988) and sensegiving reported to strongly influence organisational actors as they interpret and enact strategic change (e.g. Balogun et al., 2015; Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Kaplan, 2008; Marin et al., 2016). Further to this, SAP scholarship has also sought to understand exactly how strategies are created (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009), and how aggregate and individual actor groups influence strategic activity (Jarzabkowski, 2008; Sajasalo, Auvinen, Takala, Järvenpää, & Sintonen, 2015; Sillince, Jarzabkowski, & Shaw, 2012). A line of scholarship here has been attentive to further unpacking what influencing strategy actually entails. Such an example includes how the board of directors develop strategy in actuality, and under what situations these actions change (Hendry, Kiel, & Nicholson, 2010).

2.4 The Role of HR practitioners

2.4.1 Introducing HR practitioner roles

My research's overarching aim is to understand how the Human Resource Function (HRF), in conjunction with its organisational partners (who are situated at different vertical and horizontal levels within their organisation) act strategically. My work looks to also provide explanatory mechanisms for such observed variations in relationships between different business partners. It is

therefore important to pay attention to both non-HR and HR practitioners as they craft or implement strategy within their differing organisational settings. Practitioners in SAP - as already discussed – encompass both individuals and aggregate actors. SAP accepts that a diverse range of actors play a part in the doing of strategy. SAP is cognizant of the roles these actors play in achieving organisational outcomes.

From a SAP perspective “strategy is not a static property of a firm but is continuously created in the doing of strategy work” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013, p. 41). Strategy and strategising therefore extends beyond the domain of top managers alone, with strategic activities having been well-argued to go beyond the activities of managers (cf Mantere, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2003).

The body of scholarship that most closely pays attention to this within HRM is a stream of research categorised as *HR role theory*. This section examines extant HR role theory literature in addition to associated bodies of work that look at the roles of practitioners regarding strategic activity - including the changing roles of HR practitioners. I will illustrate literature that has shown *what* HR does, what HR practitioners should do, and more recently, the broader challenges associated with being a strategic partner. Yet, this body of literature has been less forthcoming regarding what it means to be strategic, or *more* strategic – especially when it comes to understanding *how* the HRF actually acts strategically, in terms of the actions undertaken in doing so (Björkman et al., 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 2002).

2.4.2 A brief history of the changing roles in HRM

Major transformations of HR practitioner roles have been prescribed by influential scholars such as Ulrich and his colleagues, while also having been empirically observed by scholars over the course of HRM's evolution. The evolution of these changing HR roles is reflected in the changing vocabulary of the profession. Namely, from *employment management* to *personnel management* (Hotchkiss, 1923), then *personnel management's* turn to *human resource management*, and finally, the successive transition to *strategic human resource management* (Legge, 1995c).

The evolution of HR role theory has resulted in a vein of literature that has largely put its energy towards distinguishing between dichotomies of activity. Contemporary scholarship has therefore essentially focused on differentiating between strategic and administrative tasks (Björkman et al., 2014; Huselid et al., 1997; Welch & Welch, 2012). This subsection will provide a review of how HR roles have evolved and been viewed over time.

2.4.2.1 *Personnel management*

There has been a significant diversity of opinion regarding the origins and history of personnel management, and subsequently the historical antecedents leading to modern SHRM (Kaufman, 2001). To step into this debate would go beyond the scope of my thesis and does not do justice to the varied and enlightened perspectives argued by scholars. The differing positions of the very early origins of the domain, however, can be understood through several enlightened works (Carroll & Schuler, 1983; Cotton, 1993; Kaufman, 2001, 2007; Stanton, 1993). As such, regarding perspectives pertaining to the

changing roles of HR practitioners, I will simply note that early HR practices were implemented by the 'personnel department', whose major role between 1911 and 1930 was keeping records of employees (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2006).

Such roles also became concerned with the execution of policy to control employees (Donald & Donald, 1929). This included training, dealing with the distribution of salaries and solving employee related issues (Hotchkiss, 1923). These roles were predominantly directed towards blue-collar workers and largely remained unchanged up until the mid-1960s (Ivancevich, 1992).

As a demand for more managerial capability materialised, so too did the need for personnel specialists (Gilmore & Williams, 2007). However, the ensuing reforms of personnel policies stemming from this did little to improve the status of practitioners (Sisson, 1995). The changing dynamics of organisations, and the transition from personnel management to human resource management (Torrington & Hall, 1998) did offer promise for the personnel function to undertake a strategic role - auspiciously presenting the opportunity to improve organisational prestige of the personnel management profession (Gilmore & Williams, 2007).

2.4.2.2 The transition from personnel management to HRM

Personnel managers failing to obtain their desired credibility and acknowledgement from broader management had been a long-standing issue for the personnel management profession (Legge, 1995b). The emerging rhetoric and discourse referencing 'HRM' was a means to assert and project a greatly improved standing (Legge, 1995b). This stemmed from broader

environmental changes such as the emerging knowledge economy, which obliged HR professionals to direct their energies towards a greater strategic role (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1998). Such discourse promoted a vision of HR central to strategic necessities, and HR's elevated role as a contributor of organisational strategy (Beer et al., 1984; Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

Legge (1995c), however, notes that the transition of terminology from personnel management to HRM did not occur by those engaged in the practice of personnel management, but through the writings of US academics. The term HRM promptly crossed the Atlantic to also quickly become embraced by UK scholars (Legge, 1995c). Entering into the 1990s, the term HRM had fully taken hold, with this reflected in the titles of HR practitioners, job advertisements and university course offerings (Legge, 1995c). As scholars led the HRM charge, academic work focused on an array of expanding areas.

2.4.2.3 The transition from HRM to SHRM

The majority of HRM soon began to focus on performance issues (Guest, 1997, 1999), and in turn the field increasingly edged towards its next major shift - from HRM to SHRM. Where the traditional role of the personnel manager had short-term objectives centred around administration (Guest, 1999), the new role of the HR manager inherently became linked to being 'more strategic'. In the academic literature, this would embrace understanding HRM's role in achieving strategic goals, and as such the contribution's effect on performance. A more comprehensive overview of SHRM is provided in section 2.5 - where I cover the progress made within SHRM scholarship, and subsequently an assessment of the state of extant SHRM research. For this

section, however, I will only discuss SHRM as it pertains to affecting the roles of HR practitioners.

Scholars did not immediately agree upon distinctions between HRM and SHRM, nor the boundaries between the two. Truss and Gratton (1994) note that debate around delineating HRM and SHRM goes back to the early 1980s. While the literature develops a distinction between the two (cf. Boxall, 1992; Butler, Ferris, & Napier, 1991; Evans, 1986; Legge, 1989; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 1990; Miles & Snow, 1984; Pettigrew, Hendry, & Sparrow, 1988; Poole, 1990; Storey, 1992; Wright & McMahan, 1992), I will not step into the finer deliberations of such distinctions. In certain respects, much debate still surrounds the way SHRM should be viewed. Notwithstanding, one distinction that emerged as a result of this debate is articulated by Truss and Gratton (1994). They note that:

We should, perhaps regard SHRM as the over-arching concept that links management and the deployment of individuals within the organisation to the business as a whole and its environment, while HRM could be viewed as an organizing activity that takes place under this umbrella. In this way, the essential features of SHRM can be summarized as follows:

- *There is an explicit linkage of some kind between HR policy and practices and overall organisational strategic aims and the organisational environment.*
- *There is some organizing schema linking individual HR interventions so that they are mutually supportive.*
- *Much of the responsibility for the management of human resources is devolved down the line (p. 666).*

2.4.3 HR practitioner legitimacy concerns

From the perspective of HR professionals, the term strategic HRM (SHRM) “signal[s] their belief that effective HRM contributes to business effectiveness [...]”. Many HRM scholars share this basic understanding of what ‘strategic

HRM' means" (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 2). Those illustrated as relevant actors with HRM scholarship have sometimes been referred to as the "HR Triad" (Jackson & Schuler, 2003). These actors include HR professionals, line managers and employees. HRM practices are represented by the daily enactment of HR philosophies and policies. These are socially embedded activities that are continually evolving (Schuler, 1992) for the triad.

However, the aspirations of incorporating the HRF into making strategic contributions has expanded the stakeholder dynamic to a much broader one (Jackson et al., 2014). A critical element for the HRF – as previously briefly discussed - has therefore been the legitimacy of the function. Typically within a firm, any given organisational unit's capabilities are being constantly assessed – both explicitly and implicitly – through the scrutiny of both central decision makers and top management (Mäkelä, Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Smale, & Sumelius, 2013). Consequently, the extent and level of importance that stakeholders give to *people issues* is a central theme to this – and includes top, middle and line managers, in addition to employees (Björkman, Ehrnrooth, Smale, & John, 2011; Tsui, 1987; Tsui, 1990). Assessment of any organisational group's capabilities that is determined to be high, can result in additional positive attention from both decision makers, and in turn, the wider organisation (Ambos, Andersson, & Birkinshaw, 2010). Accordingly, if all these varied stakeholders are unified in their belief of the significance of such issues, the HRF's influence within the organisation can be significant (Gottschalg & Zollo, 2007).

The history of the battle for legitimacy of the HRF (Gilmore & Williams, 2007; Legge, 1995b), and the subsequent promise of achieving this through embodying a strategic role (Guest, 1987) has not been an easy journey. Legge's (1978) seminal work on the roles of personnel managers argued that despite an array of prescriptive texts, the HRF¹ faced a challenge implementing advocated solutions. Such roles were reasoned to be mitigated by power constructs that represented three *vicious circles*. The first circle stemmed from centralised decision making – largely in line with a top down view of decision making. This was argued to result in ambiguity, and subsequently a reactive approach by the HRF not perceived as valuable by line managers. This in turn completed the first circle, acting as a justification for continued segregation from the strategic process.

The second *vicious circle* entailed ambiguity regarding the priority of actions to be undertaken by the HRF. This stemmed from uncertainty of what constituted successful criteria. The result of this lack of strategic integration further strengthened the HRF's strong reactive frameworks, in which the HRF would embrace activity from the line, and accept queries and interactions. This consequently further reinforced the HRF's ad-hoc and functionally orientated positioning. The third vicious circle pertains to the HRF not being able to attract dynamic talent. The cause of this stemmed from the low status of the HRF. Without the ability to attract dynamic and experienced people who had already had previous strategic exposure, the HRF experienced an ongoing

¹ The terminology 'human resource function' (HRF) and 'personnel management' have been used interchangeably for flow and ease of reading. During the period surrounding the work of Legge (1978), the terms personnel manager/personnel management/personnel management department were the actual lexicon of the time.

inability to make meaningful contributions to strategic level decisions due to a lack of necessary competencies.

2.4.3.1 Perceived HR practitioner competencies

The evaluation of the competency of HR practitioners, as reflected in the views of senior managers in subsequent work after that of Legge (1978), has not shown itself to be any more flattering. Coming into the turn of the millennium, research showed HR managers themselves remained more comfortable with demonstrating technical efficacy over strategic effectiveness (Huselid et al., 1997). The HR manager's greater comfort in dealing with functional matters has not gone unobserved by senior management either. Generally, the literature and discourse show a strong preference by senior managers for a strategically aligned HRF. Yet, evaluations of the HR manager's competencies leading into the new millennium were also considerably misaligned with the expectations of senior executives.

For example, Johnson (1997) presents an interesting and uniquely framed chapter on the perceptions of the HRF. He opens his story on dealing with a host of senior executives from all around the world, in the capacity of an HR executive search partner. He aptly frames the perceptions of HR professionals when he illustrates how almost every meeting he has with a CEO looking for a HR head begins:

I don't want a typical HR type, I don't even think I want someone from HR. I want this person to be the brightest, smartest, bravest, most strategic, and highly potential individual on this management team. That's probably not going to be somebody from HR (p. 130).

Johnson (1997) goes on to say that it gets even scarier when HR candidates themselves go to great lengths in an interview to articulate that they are different from other HR professionals – more strategic, more change orientated. In essence, the role of a HR practitioner was perceived as a second class citizen (Johnson, 1997). This is a role that the HRF has struggled to escape from.

Guest and King (2004) note that quality and management experience of HR practitioners remains an issue for senior executives. While some HR directors have become trusted confidants, an almost similar number of senior executives believe the HRF should not be making strategic decisions. They note that “the HRF were significantly at odds with the expectations of their colleagues, and that a greater number of negative than positive comments about the performance of the HRF [occurred]” (p. 416). Such overall poor perceptions of the HRF’s strategic aptitude from business partners have seen HR practitioners look towards high level strategic integration as a remedy to these perceptions. A seat in the boardroom has long been a highly desired aspiration of the HRF (Guest & King, 2004; Sisson, 1995). Caldwell (2011) notes that the predominate belief in the prescriptive texts is that a seat on the board is the definitive means to move to a strategic role – so much so that he refers to such a realisation as the ‘Holy Grail’ of the HR profession.

2.4.4 How and where are HR practitioners acting strategically?

2.4.4.1 Aspiration’s for boardroom representation

While HR practitioners have aimed their sights on the boardroom, in cases where these aspirations have been achieved evidence largely does not support

any significant strategic impact resulting from a board position. Longitudinal research by Lawler and Boudreau (2015) illustrated that the manner in which the HRF has helped boards has in fact been limited. They report that from their findings few significant changes had occurred between 2003 in 2013 because of the HRF having boardroom representation. They did however find - while it was not a strong relationship – that boards are more likely to use HR's help on strategic issues if the organisation has a strong strategic focus. The overall impact of strategic involvement and boardroom interaction is, however, perhaps best summed up with their statement: "Overall, it is clear that in most companies, HR has its foot in the boardroom door, but that is all, and there is no evidence of this changing" (p. 24).

It is true that evidence shows boards are spending more time devoted to strategy (Anderson, Melanson, & Maly, 2007), but within the literature varied empirical and theoretical positions have garnered little agreement on understanding how boards contribute to strategy (Hendry et al., 2010). This poses problems for understanding how an HR practitioner contributes to strategy, especially if we look beyond merely having a seat at the table. In one of the few studies to address how board members and senior management contribute to strategy, Hendry et al. (2010) – using an SAP approach - identified varied states of strategic contribution in which boards and management conform to. They found that, like both the active and passive schools of behaviour purport, how 'the manner boards' act in their strategic role can be very context dependent.

Accordingly, how the board of directors interacted with management in their strategic role were found to range from procedural strategising to interactive strategising. In the first instance, the former engaged in either a minimalist approach to strategy, or, an oversight position that favoured management engaging in strategic decisions, with the board having high structural legitimacy. In the case of the latter, such a position was formed by either a high engagement towards episodic calibration with management for the transformation of the firm, or continuous and ongoing collaboration with management.

Such findings first align to Lawler and Boudreau (2015) assertions that boards were more likely to employ HR's help if the organisation has a strong strategic focus. Second, they add to an array of approaches that seek to look beyond what practices are being used, to focus on how such practices emerge, and how they are carried out. In terms of the implications of their findings, Hendry et al. (2010) found context seems to play an important role in such positions being adopted, and in turn becomes a strong influencer on how strategy is shaped.

Along these lines in the HR domain, thus far, there appears to be insufficient explanations regarding what conditions HR strategic interactions function under, and under what conditions they would likely occur. Similarly, at this level of analysis, scholarship has yet to sufficiently demonstrate an understanding of how the HRF's ability to contribute to strategy is influenced by organisational dynamics, and how strategic influence occurs in practical terms. Certainly, a small number of finer grained enquiries have made

advancements in this respect (Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 2002; Welch & Welch, 2012), but our understanding regarding what being strategic actually entails, and the phenomena around this, still remains constrained (Björkman et al., 2014).

2.4.4.2 Strategic activity beyond the boardroom

A possible limitation that has hindered progress towards understanding how strategic activity is carried out between organisations and the HRF stems from the levels of analysis being employed within scholarship. Being confined to the senior management level of analysis alone (Wright & Nishii, 2007; Wright & Nishii, 2013), in the pursuit of understanding how HR is strategic, may be ill-conceived. As Caldwell (2011) points out, from a SAP perspective, the focus on the strategic importance of the board room may be somewhat misguided. He notes that high level representation is of little importance if one is unable to exercise influence. He draws on the findings of Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) to note: what is important is that “HR can exercise influence and make a business contribution at whatever level is appropriate” (p. 54). Subsequently, other avenues of strategic influence that are available to the HRF are dependent on context.

Indeed, HR scholarship would point to this. Kelly and Gennard (2007), in their research on the locus of strategic decision making, showed that board of director membership is not required to influence strategic formulation and strategic decisions. Rather, influence occurs with proximity to the CEO in committees, with informal channels also available to exert influence. Other scholarship by Brandl and Pohler (2010) notes that the constraints upon the

CEO narrows or widens the strategic role he or she can bestow upon the HRF. The scope the CEO has for action, their willingness to delegate responsibility, and their perceived aptitude of the HRF all influence how much strategic responsibility the HRF has. Such findings have significant implications for *how* the HRFs and various HR actors assert agency – discussed in section 2.8 – if one is attentive to the emergent and dynamic nature of strategy (Mintzberg, 1978).

That is not to say that boardroom placement does not play a role in strategic action. Caldwell (2011) found that HR directors within the boardroom are more confident in their ability to exert strategic influence, yet noted that many of their interviewees asserted executive committees, as well as partnerships with line management, were both equally important in the emergent process of strategy formulation. They reported that a seat at the boardroom table was therefore not required to exert influence, yet the status and legitimacy granted from a seat was still profoundly important to HR practitioners. Such findings would suggest that while understanding how HRM strategic influence occurs within the boardroom would be useful to HRM scholarship, other levels of analysis will likely bear more immediate impact when seeking to understand how HR acts strategically.

In respect to HR interactions with other BUs as a means to be strategic, social capital research by Mäkelä et al. (2013) illustrates that despite the intuitive notion that centrality and proximity to key decision makers would yield strategic influence, such proximity to strategic decision makers does not always result in the actualisation of strategic influence. The premise of

structural social capital acting as a pathway to influence strategy is certainly inviting. Close proximity between the HRF and BU heads could easily be conceived as a critical condition for individual action (Sumelius, Björkman, & Smale, 2008).

Yet, Mäkelä et al. (2013) found no meaningful relationship between structural capital and strategic capabilities. Rather, relational social capital presented as a strong and significant relationship (i.e., the degree of trust, norms and expectations embedded within relationships). As their findings illustrate, structural capital may present an opportunity for proximity to establish a relationship between HR practitioners and business actors, but the nature of the relationship is what impacts strategic capabilities (Mäkelä et al., 2013).

SAP scholarship by Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009) further supports these findings. In research reviewing how strategic planning delivers strategic integration, they argue that integration is unlikely to stem merely “from bringing people together” (p. 1256). In their work, exclusion from strategic discourse was found to be possible, even if physical inclusion is granted, and actors are active. These findings add to a growing body of literature that advances the idea that the strategic influence of HR can be achieved without a position in the boardroom (Armstrong, 2000; Kelly & Gennard, 2001; Stiles & Taylor, 2001; Torrington & Hall, 1996).

Influence therefore cannot be either assumed or assured merely because structurally one is granted proximity to senior managers, or any key strategic stakeholder. Such research, however, also reflects that legitimacy issues remain highly relevant within the HR profession. If proximity to board

members and senior managers by HR professionals does not guarantee strategic influence, understanding how strategic interaction occurs despite this, or in response to this is worthy of investigation. Given that legitimacy concerns have been a factor in the literature already discussed, it is perhaps not surprising that this is also the case in other areas of scholarship.

2.4.5 A broader stakeholder approach to strategic activity

2.4.5.1 HR practitioner and senior manager strategic interaction

If strategic influence through proximity has questionable utility, then where and how is strategic influence occurring by HR practitioners in HR related strategies? Strategic activity surrounding the formulation and implementation of HR strategies that involve HR directors and organisational senior management is in fact, a well-researched level of analysis (Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010b). With senior managers, high levels of strategic activity surround the direction of the HRF (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Guest, 1997; Lepak & Snell, 1999a; Macky & Boxall, 2007; Stanton et al., 2010b; Wright et al., 1994). Such work has been predominately dedicated to two areas. The first has been to obtain senior management assessments of how HR is positively or negatively perceived in its interactions. In many cases matched pairs of HR directors and senior managers have been employed in pursuit of this vein of enquiry (Guest & King, 2004). The second has been to identify types of strategic and functional activity occurring between the HRF and business units, and accordingly determining the strength of such interactions.

In the case of the former, this stream has generally perused senior management evaluations of the HRF, reporting the HRF or HR directors either

as being important to the firm or having low status (Björkman et al., 2014). Articles along these lines, such as Guest and King (2004), have offered deep and worthwhile insights into HR's status and perceived utility of the HRF. Such findings include the degree of integration occurring, and roles the HRF and HR directors have in supporting their organisations' CEOs. This scholarship paints a better picture surrounding the contextual issues influencing the strength of the HR practitioner and senior management's relationship. The work has also been valuable in understanding HR's progress on the ground in its ongoing aspirational pursuit of legitimacy and strategic significance while also illustrating the role senior management has in influencing perspectives of HR across the broader organisation.

Stanton et al. (2010b) showed the strength of the HR system through the perceptions of a broad level of managers and the HRF. These include senior, middle and line managers. Their work provides insights into the role of the CEO in legitimacy and resource creation of distinctive HR systems. Utilisation of these multiple levels of evaluation of HR and broader units are seldom employed. Using these multiple levels of analysis, the authors were able to show that high level leadership is able to influence broader stakeholders positive perceptions of HRM, as long as there is group agreement that transmits its message informally and formally, and such messages are relevant and consistent (Stanton et al., 2010b). The authors argue "that the key to creating a strong HRM system is to encourage all levels of the management hierarchy to *sing the same song*" (p. 580).

Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) similarly employed a broad stakeholder approach, reviewing the belief structures and perceptions supporting HRM systems. Their work highlights excessive ceremonialism, identity projects and aspirational control as explanations for HR policies deviating from stated policies. This in essence occurred from the reinterpretation of HR systems and practices. Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) addresses a cultural-symbolic perspective. In one of their cases, HR arrangements beyond operational efficiency gained credibility. This went beyond legitimacy, and resulted in standing out as superior, original and special. The findings of their study support the argument that other mechanisms are at play beyond the mainstream belief that performance outcomes derive from HR practices through the component realisation of plans and intentions (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) note the worth of observing HR practices, instead of considering them 'black-boxed' phenomena that translate a specific input to a predicible outcome.

2.4.5.2 HR practitioner and business unit integration

In respect to strategic integration research, such work generally peruses the degree of strategic contribution that HR practitioners make towards the broader organisational strategy, as well as functional support the HRF offers to business units. This has been achieved by reviewing the connection between the HRF and business units, with the partnering of the two being the focus of enquiry. The progressive works that stemmed from the research of Golden and Ramanujam (1985) have articulated the amount of strategic integration

between the HRF and BU. This has been done mainly through aggregating the perspectives of senior managers and their HR director level colleagues.

Golden and Ramanujam (1985) founded a stream of research that attends to HR strategic and non-strategic interactions which primarily focuses on identifying strategic integration between the HFF and strategic business partners. Those that the HRF partner with are referred to as business partners. Golden and Ramanujam (1985) identified four phases of HRF-BU interaction that represented levels of integration that range “between a dream and a nightmare” (p. 434). The continuum of interaction begins with an administrative linkage, before subsequently progressing towards one-way linkage, two-way linkage and finally an integrative linkage. The actions within these groupings centred largely on the levels of proactivity of integration resonating between the HRM function and the strategic business partner (SBP). The directionality of such interaction is a central component to this line of scholarship.

The *administrative linkage* entails the HRM function dealing only in day to day transactional activities, while *one-way linkage* entails one of the two parties taking a dominant role in strategic integration. *Two-way linkage* entails “a reciprocal and interdependent relationship between SBP and HRM” (p. 438), while the fourth linkage is referred to as an *integrative linkage*. “Integration describes a dynamic, multifaceted linkage that is based on an interactive instead of a reciprocal relationship” (p.439) and is a highly desirable state of adoption.

2.4.5.3 Progress made within strategic integration scholarship

A number of subsequent studies have gone on to employ Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) framework, which have further illuminated the degree of strategic linkage within firms. One cluster has been valuable in identifying the level of HRM integration within specific industry settings (Buller, 1988) – for example, settings such as public sector organisations that have undergone corporatisation (Teo, 2000). A second cluster has incorporated Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) framework to interconnect strategic integration and performance outcomes (Martell & Carroll, 1995), while a third has examined particular firm level strategies and looked at the HRF's role in implementation. These include CSR (Sarvaiya et al., 2015). Most of these works have attended to the “content perspective of strategic management.” However, progress towards using this work to focus more on a strategic process perspective has recently been forthcoming, illustrated within the work of Sarvaiya et al. (2015).

Sarvaiya et al. (2015) addressed the neglect of contextual influence, and *how* HR roles are performed by HR practitioners within CSR. Indeed, as previously articulated, messy context does not make for clean models (Hirsch et al., 1987; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008b). Absent from much HR scholarship has been research that addresses such context (Jackson et al., 2014). The contribution of Sarvaiya et al. (2015) brings back strategic process elements to Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) framework. Sarvaiya et al. (2015) addressed amongst their research questions: “[u]nder which circumstances and conditions are HR roles performed. Such an approach

moves positively towards delineating the “complexity of boundaries between strategic and transactional work” (Pritchard, 2010, p.176). It also addresses concerns of the argued simplistic positioning of strategic and operational discrepancies (Parkes & Davis, 2013; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). However, it did not address in detail how variations occur in terms of the activities undertaken.

Boxall and Purcell (2011) provide a narrative of the *process* of strategic management that paints the beginnings of the messy way senior managers interact in the process of strategic decision making, bringing to light contextual issues. As they paint the picture of a managerial setting common in any number of organisations, they refer to the possible need for ‘*force majeure*’ to combat the agency of various stakeholder coalitions that choose to assert their will. Such a picture is highly plausible, yet there is a dearth of empirical work around senior managers and HR directors interacting in such a manner. Different stakeholder groups work in coalitions to pursue different agendas. Therefore, what constitutes desirable strategic action – indeed even what is viewed as strategic action - for one group may not be the same for another. The way HR responds to each of these different coalitions should not be assumed to be uniform either. Yet, in the work that has progressed upon the research position of Golden and Ramanujam (1985), this intra-firm variability has not been examined. Truss et al. (2002) and Pritchard (2010) have both shown that intra-firm dynamics are highly impactful, and that strategic interactions are unlikely to constitute the homogeneous transactions between different stakeholder groups.

Truss et al. (2002), in their eight-year longitudinal study, reviewed strategic integration through the roles of the HRF. They specifically addressed the pressures to be “more strategic” that often is heard in discourse surrounding the HRF. They illustrated the point that for one to undertake a more strategic role, one must have discretion to do so, being deliberate through action (Flood, 1998). Yet role expectations, or roles set by other organisational stakeholders, play a part in crafting what being strategic should entail, and accordingly influences change (Flood, 1998). Truss et al. (2002) caution conceiving strategy purely in a Porterian, rationalist manner, arguing that “strategy is as much about implementation as it is about firm positioning (p. 40). As such, Truss et al. (2002) puts forward the need for a configurational approach to viewing HRM.

Drawing on Purcell (2001), who employs a configurational approach towards HR strategic contribution, Truss et al. (2002) focus their research on the implementation of being strategic by moving from an outward looking position towards an inward-looking view that incorporates behaviour, resources and processes – in essence, the implementation of strategy. This is argued to represent a better position for viewing strategic contribution (Purcell, 2001). By employing this conceptualisation of strategy, Truss et al. (2002) therefore note that “what is considered strategic is likely to vary between organisational contexts and that it may be difficult to establish a neat categorisation that encapsulates this variety” (p. 40).

Also addressing context and HR strategic activity, Pritchard (2010) explored the tensions of the HRF *becoming strategic* through a longitudinal

perspective. In doing so, her research explored the HR-business partner dynamic, where calls in prescriptive texts argue for HR to be *more strategic* (Björkman et al., 2014). Her yearlong ethnographic study provides an in-depth picture of the lived experiences of those within the HRF. It follows HR practitioners as they battled with the tensions of *becoming strategic*, or continued to act as generalists, something they had always done. The article explores “how individual HR practitioners work through, negotiate and manage the tensions of *becoming strategic partners*” (p. 177).

Pritchard’s (2010) work illustrated the unfolding situated identity tensions arising as one group of HR professionals undertook training in a firm level transition towards becoming strategic partners. Ambiguity was a core theme of her findings. Within the course of organisational interactions, an understanding of what the role of strategic partner entailed was neither clear nor unified. Vague language emerged surrounding what *strategic* actually entailed when business partners spoke to HR personnel within strategic training sessions.

Similarly, HR practitioners who were in the group that was transiting to strategic partner began to downgrade the importance of generalist work. They themselves were vague on what strategic activities entailed. Contrasting this, some members that remained in the functional team – not embarking on a transition to becoming strategic – used ‘strategic’ in an ironic sense. For them, the real work was happening in transactional activities. Here, the tensions within the HRF itself emerged from this emerging dichotomy. The relevance here for my study is that variation exists between HR practitioners and

different units regarding what strategy means, and accordingly such variation requires further investigation primarily in where and how variation emerges.

2.4.6 Strategic work with the line

While the role of senior managers has been a central focus of HR scholarship, there is a growing body of evidence that supports the importance of line managers in HR strategy (Stanton et al., 2010b). Yet, despite this, there has been generally limited attention paid to understanding line manager roles (Brewster, Gollan, & Wright, 2013). Overall, literature around HR performance assumes the importance of the HRF, without accounting for line managers (Brewster et al., 2013; Currie & Procter, 2001; Gollan, 2012; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). As Brewster et al. (2013) note, where HR scholarship has incorporated line managers, it has occurred along the content and process lines of scholarship. In the case of the former, the objective has been to focus on the HR practices themselves, while with the latter, concern falls on examining the process and the strength of HR systems (Brewster et al., 2013; Li, Frenkel, & Sanders, 2011).

Literature within the process view of scholarship has looked at line manager perceptions of HR systems, and subsequent outcomes stemming from this (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Li et al., 2011; Sanders, Dorenbosch, & de Reuver, 2008). This research has been concerned with the level of consensus between HR managers and line managers. The outcomes of this research – like that undertaken at the senior manager levels of analysis - has largely focused on comparing accounts between HR practitioners and line managers as a means to ‘confirm or contest role transformation’ (Pritchard, 2010).

2.4.6.1 Line management's criticisms of HR practitioners

Tension from line management towards the role transformation of the HRF was addressed in the early work of Legge (1978). Her work identified legitimacy pressures from line managers forming part of the vicious circles. Whittaker and Marchington (2003) also paint a picture that very little has changed in the perceptions of line managers towards the HRF. They contend that many criticisms of HRM come from line managers, manifesting in one or more of four predominant arrangements.

The first is that HR practitioners are 'out of touch' with the realities of the commercial world (e.g., HR practitioners have an inability to adequately understand the customer and the nature of operational business or strategic goals). Accordingly, decisions by HR are made with little regard to the important dynamic of competitive positioning. The second criticism is the HRF's focus on labour relations. This has been reported to frustrate and constrain the autonomy of line managers who must make decisions aligned to performance. Third, the HRF is slow reacting, even unresponsive, and unnecessarily judicious in their checking of options. Finally, the HRF develops policies that sound fine in theory, but are difficult to implement. This is in part because the HRF pays little regard to the contextual aspects of that work environment.

Such contextual elements have illustrated tensions between prescriptive, aspirational and ideal states of HRM and actual practices (Caldwell, 2001). As business units become more autonomous and self-sufficient (Caldwell, 2001), the nature of HR work with these units - including line management - is in

need of understanding. The focus of scholarship provides “role descriptions to either confirm or contest role transformation” (Pritchard, 2010, p. 176), yet the empirical work that investigates how this HR work is undertaken is relatively limited (Björkman et al., 2014; Farndale & Brewster, 2005; Pritchard, 2010; Watson, 2004).

2.4.7 Competencies of HR practitioners

The general assertion that the HRF is seen as a second-class citizen has resulted in HR practitioners seeking to address these legitimacy issues. As already noted, the disposition towards becoming strategic was seen as a means to address this. One vein of research associated with this has looked at the competencies of HRF. The competency vein of literature associated with HR role theory and SHRM started twenty years ago with the seminal work of Ulrich and colleagues at the Michigan School of Business (Ho & Teo, 2015). Value addition to the business by the HRF was plausible if the HRF exhibited newer competences sought by partners deemed necessary for strategic partnership (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich, 1998).

It is argued that a mastery of knowledge (Ulrich & Beatty, 1999) and the application of this knowledge in business specific situations (Ramlall, 2006) is a mechanism by which HR can contribute to performance (Caldwell, 2010). This body of literature has (1) offered what the roles and competency of HR should be, while (2) also providing an extensive range of competency models as a means for HR improvements. The role of these models has been seen to guide HR practitioners, with the impact of specified HR competencies within these works potentially influencing the direction of HR practitioners’

professional development (Graham & Tarbell, 2006). For instance, the University of Michigan, the Society of Human Resource Management, and the Global Consulting Alliance created an HR competency toolkit as a means for HR practitioners to evaluate and further develop their skills (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2004). This has been reported by Ramlall (2006) to be utilised throughout the world by HR practitioners.

Becker, Huselid, and Ulrich (2001) as cited by Ramlall (2006), define an individual's competence as "the knowledge, skills, abilities, or personal characteristics that directly influence one's performance" (p. 26). Put forward by Brockbank, Ulrich, and James (1997), the five expected major competencies of HR professionals are extensively cited, and employed within practice. These competencies are: strategic contribution, personal credibility, HR delivery, business knowledge and HR technology.

2.4.7.1 The impact of prescriptive HR competences

With such a broad base of prescriptive competences advocating strategic actions, what has the result been? Ho and Teo (2015), using signalling theory, found that while in New Zealand the competency literature had turned towards more strategic concerns, signals of organisation taken from recruitment advertisements emphasised functional instead of strategic competencies. Caldwell (2003) noted that HR competencies are not a reflection of the conflict of roles demanded daily from management and employees. HR practitioners have to cater to varied demands resulting from organisations having many constituents (Björkman et al., 2014).

Graham and Tarbell (2006), for example, used stakeholder theory to review stakeholder-HRF tensions. Stakeholder theory stresses the importance of catering to numerous constituencies. This was employed to determine if the perceptions of the HRF did in fact differ between management and employees regarding the credibility of HR. They found that different stakeholders hold different positions towards the credibility of the HRF. Stakeholders emphasised varied positions: employees, trust; management, expertise and operational relationships; and for top management, the achievement of results. This is one of the few examples of research addressing multiple stakeholders. As later discussed in section 2.6, employees, while acknowledged as important, receive little attention regarding their views (Clark, Mabey, & Skinner, 1998; Guest, 1999).

2.4.8 Typologies of HR roles

HR role typologies represent a significant part of HRM scholarship. Within them, both strategic legitimacy and competencies are largely addressed, as such models generally outline roles and competencies HR practitioners can undertake for better integration into the strategic spectrum. The first typology addressing legitimacy and strategic competency is Legge (1978). In addition to painting the predicament personnel managers found themselves in regarding the *vicious circles*, the early work of Legge (1978) also put forward two roles personnel managers could take as a means of achieving greatly needed power and authority.

Legge's typology included embracing the *conformist innovator* or *deviant innovator* role to obtain power and influence. The ambiguity associated with

what role the HRF played in performance is due to overlaps with general management, and the position HR managers are placed in by having to represent employees while simultaneously sitting with management. This required HR managers to overcome such ambiguity through power and authority (Guest & King, 2004). Further aspirational strategic role topologies followed Legge.

Tyson and Fell (1986) provided three positions for the HRF that incorporated a spectrum of activities stemming from least strategic to most strategic. They used a building metaphor (Tyson, 1987) to demonstrate this continuum. This range flows from 'low discretion to high discretion' (Caldwell, 2001). *The 'clerk of works' model* places the role of the HRF² squarely in an administrative support role. The position of the HRF is concerned with recruitment, record keeping and welfare. There is no involvement with business planning, nor is there any significant training given to HR professionals, nor any authority granted to the HRF- which in turn removed the need for any political positioning of the HRF. Delegation of authority is accordingly given to the line.

'The contracts manager' model has the HRF acting on behalf of the line management, largely in the capacity of industrial relations experts who fix issues arising with trade unions. The value of the HR professional is in maintaining harmony through the ability to make timely informal agreements as well as decisions to do so. *The 'architect' model* sees the HR director as a

² While the original texts of many of these early typologies used the terminology 'personnel manager' and 'personnel management', I have simply used the latter terms of 'HRM', 'HR manager', and 'HRF' in order to keep a consistent discourse.

part of the organisation, building a means to contribute to the business's success through explicit policies aligned with strategic planning. There is accordingly an integrated control system. As such, the influence of these three models incorporates different traditions as outlined by Tyson (1987). *'The Clerk of works'* model draws from the traditions of welfare and employment management, while *The Contracts Manager Model* also draws from these with the addition of industrial relations. The role of architect subsequently draws from professional traditions that see HR practitioners take on a role of change, in addition to also drawing from the previously discussed traditions of the other models.

Caldwell (2001) notes that while Tyson's model is highly useful and likely the most well-known in understanding HR roles, it omits a critical element of 'change agent'. He also draws attention to the constraints of typology that is one dimensional and linear. The ability to incorporate 'change agent' within such a framework accordingly presents difficulties (Storey, 1992). As such, Caldwell (2001) outlines the significance of 'change maker' first being portrayed in a study undertaken by Storey (1992). This resulted in the utilisation of two axes, and a more dynamic two-dimensional model. The model incorporated advisors, handmaidens, regulators, and change makers (Storey, 1992).

The vertical axis of the model runs from strategic to tactical, while the horizontal axis, which runs from left to right through the centre of the horizontal axis starts with interventionary and flows to non-interventionary. Accordingly, the change-maker role is interventionary and strategic. Advisors

are strategic and non-interventionary, while regulators are interventionary and tactical. Handmaidens represent the final typology in which the role incorporates neither strategic nor interventionary activities. Accordingly, this role (tactical/non-interventionary) represents the administrative and operational elements HR has sought to distance itself from in its battle for legitimacy. Table 2.1 offers a comparison of these typologies. It illustrates the strategic and operational nature of the role aligned to influential typologies.

Table 2.1: Comparing HR role typologies

| Nature of role | Storey (1992) | Ulrich (1997) | Caldwell (2003) |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Strategic | Advisor | — | Advisor |
| | — | Strategic partner | — |
| | Changemaker | Change agent | Change agent |
| Operational | Regulator | — | Regulator |
| | — | Employee champion | — |
| | Handmaiden | Administrative expert | Service provider |

Taken from Welch and Welch (2012)

The impact of such earlier prescriptive typologies in practice, was however, marginal. As Caldwell (2001) noted: despite plenty of opportunity, in the 1980s HR managers appeared to have made little progress - adopting neither of these roles (Clark, 1993; Guest, 1991). Only a limited number of HR managers were found to have partly adopted the role of deviant innovator in the 1990s (Hope-Hailey, Gratton, McGovern, Stiles, & Truss, 1997). Nearing the end of the 20th century, Ulrich (1997) put forward four roles in which he argued the HRF could create value for their organisation (Buyens & De Vos, 2001).

These proposed new roles of HR stressed the importance of “even closer integration with the business organisation” (Wright, 2008, p. 1068). The classifications of Ulrich and colleagues (Ulrich, 1997; Ulrich & Beatty, 2001; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) seemed to have significantly more impact than of previous typologies. They have been embraced by academics and practitioners alike (Wright, 2008). At the same time, Barney and Wright’s (1997) article placed HRM in a central position of the resource-based view of the firm. This position directly linked HRM with achieving competitive advantage, accordingly by default placing the role of HR practitioners within a strategic space (Caldwell, 2011).

The emphasis on the new and more strategic role presented in prescriptive literature (Caldwell, 2011) is reflected in Ulrich’s work. He presents four roles, also operating upon a two dimensional axis like the previous work of Storey (1992). Ulrich’s model (1997) accordingly depicts the roles of strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion as shown in Figure 2.3. As illustrated in Figure 2.3, the vertical axis ranges between strategic and day-to-day operations, while the horizontal axis captures processes and people. Rearrangement of the HRF is argued to be required (Wright, 2008), with such roles creating a means for the HRF to create value (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). The role of *strategic partner* is one where line managers partner with HR practitioners to enable operational effectiveness (efficiency or processes and systems) and effective creation and implementation of strategy (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

Figure 2.3: The Ulrich model (1997)

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------|
| <u>Future/Strategic Focus</u> | | |
| <u>Process</u> | Strategic Partner | Change Agent |
| | Administrative Expert | Employee Champion |
| | <u>Day-to day/Operational Focus</u> | |
| | | <u>People</u> |

Taken from Ulrich (1997)

While the influence of these typologies has been very impactful on scholarship, as already discussed, the tension of prescriptive roles, rhetoric and reality may however, further result in tensions and role conflict. Research has shown that HR practitioners purport to act differently to a variety of HR issues, and accordingly identify with multiple roles (Caldwell, 2001; Pritchard, 2010; Procter & Currie, 1999).

2.4.9 Hard and soft perspectives of HRM

Thus far, within section 2.4 I have illustrated the transformation of the broader HRM field. This includes a transition in the field from personnel management through to SHRM. Central to this section has been the roles that HR practitioners have played throughout this time, as well as the changing prescriptive and empirically grounded illustrations of what the HRF does within the broader organisation. Who HR interacts with strategically, the capabilities of the HRF, and the typologies of HR roles have all been illustrated. However, before progressing towards reviewing the SHRM literature within section 2.5, it is worthwhile reviewing the concept of *hard* and *soft* HRM. The position HRM takes towards the utilisation of human capital impacts both HR professionals expected and enacted roles, as well as

their orientation towards strategic integration. It is therefore important to include a brief review of these arguments before concluding section 2.4.

Two divergent forms of HRM have been used within the literature: soft and hard HRM. These were first differentiated by Storey (1988). The positions taken are often in stark contrast to one another (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, & Stiles, 1997). They have been used as a means to classify the disparate approaches within HRM scholarship of developmental-humanist and utilitarian-instrumentalist ideals (Legge, 1995b; Truss et al., 1997). That is, a *soft* approach treats human beings as assets from which elements like rewards and wellbeing should be given attention, while a *hard* perspective views employees as a tool from which to realise organisational goals (Sarvaiya, 2014).

The origins of these two models stem from bodies of work that are referred to as the Harvard and Michigan models, respectively (Truss et al., 1997). The Harvard model, undertaken by Beer and colleagues (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills, & Walton, 1985), represents the soft version, while the Michigan model, undertaken by Forerun and colleagues (Fombrun et al., 1984), encompasses the hard version. Within articulated soft and hard HRM definitions (Guest, 1987; Storey, 1992), “the key distinction [between the two is] whether the emphasis is placed on the *human* or the *resource*” (Truss et al., 1997, p. 54). Truss et al. (1997) discern that the soft model favours autonomy and trust, while the hard model favours control. In the case of the former, personnel who are trained and developed will in turn exhibit commitment towards their organisation (Guest, 1987; Hendry & Pettigrew, 1990; Kamoche,

1994; Mahoney & Deckop, 1986; Purcell, 1993). In contrast to this, the hard model relies on control from above.

In regards to strategic integration, Truss et al. (1997) go on to note that conceptual conflicts between these two positions produce difficulty when viewing strategic integration. They argue that conceptual boundaries along these lines are hounded by inconsistencies, especially when looking at strategic integration. In their analysis of eight in-depth case studies, Truss et al. (1997) illustrated that none of the organisations they observed employed a purely hard or soft method towards HRM. They also noted that organisational rhetoric purported favouring soft approaches, but the reality was a tight strategic direction.

Such soft and hard perspectives can also be included under the perspectives of the two dominant strategic management positions towards strategic enquiry - *strategy process*, or *strategy content*. Additionally, they can also be included under Wit and Meyer's (1998) context of strategy, from which process and content strategy are shaped (Paauwe & Boon, 2009). In respect to HRM models, *strategic process* models and literature are concerned with how strategies come about, while *strategic content* is concerned with the results of this – that is, what strategy is being used (Paauwe & Boon, 2009).

As my study takes account of strategic integration, some points bear pointing out. Notably, as Truss et al. (1997) articulated within their literature review, *linking models* of HRM and strategy - such as that of Golden and Ramanujam (1985) - align to a hard model. Such models can present “a simple, linear relationship between strategy and human resource strategy [...] This fails to

acknowledge [organisational] complexities...[for example] the Mintzbergian contrast between ‘emergent’ and ‘intended’ strategies” (p. 57). Therefore, pursuing elements of such a model *could* be deemed inconsonant with broader theoretical underpinnings that draw upon organisational complexities and socially constructed realities. However, as Truss articulates, such dichotomies are difficult to discern within their empirical setting. While they lend themselves to a strategy content approach, the notion of *clean models* rather than *dirty hands* argued within SAP scholarship (see section 2.3) illustrates the dangers of duality, and the exclusion of one over the other.

2.5 Literature on strategic human resource management

2.5.1 Introducing SHRM

In this section I first briefly discuss the emergence of SHRM before moving on to identifying the findings of broader scholarship, in which the substantive body of literature that is explicitly attributed to the SHRM domain has been developed over the last three decades (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). The purpose of this is to position the overall state of SHRM scholarship.

Kaufman (2001) notes that the early antecedents and intellectual origins of SHRM emerged in the 1920s through fundamental paradigm shifts that began to view employees as resources. “[This] was explicitly framed as an integrated set of HRM practices aimed at achieving competitive advantage in a strategic business sense, and made employee participation in the operation of the business a central part of the new style of management” (Kaufman, 2001, p. 506). A significant shift in focus, however, did not take place until the late 1970s and early 1980s when the position was put forward that the HRF was

required to deliver more than transactional and administrative practices. After Walker's (1978) appeal for linking HRM and strategic management, Devanna, Fombrun, and Tichy (1982) took up the exploration of connecting firm strategy and HRM.

This literature addressed organisational strategy explicitly, and its linkage to HRM. As earlier articulated, literature surrounding HR roles and the legitimacy of the HRF had also appeared at the end of the 1970s in Legge's (1978) work. Accordingly, SHRM's rise is accompanied by the conundrum of the HRF seeking integration into strategic elements of the firm, while being inhibited by broader organisational perceptions of the HRF – the vicious circles. Lengnick-Hall et al. (2009) refer to SHRM as a subfield that has come to cover “the overall HR strategies adopted by business units and companies and tries to measure their impacts on performance” (p.64). This incorporates strategic formulation and implementation.

2.5.2 The emergence of SHRM

In the mid-1980s, work began to investigate the strategic outcomes of SHRM as a means to exhibit the strategic value of HRM to general managers (Evans, 1984). Four strategic criteria for human resource management were identified by Evans (1986). These included: (1) equity and human relations, (2) competitive performance, (3) innovation and flexibility, and (4) corporate integration. Addressing strategic integration, and a dearth of SHRM empirical foundations until that point, Golden and Ramanujam (1985) developed a typology of four levels of integration between HR and business units from their empirical work that has already been discussed in section 2.3.4. As

already noted earlier in Chapter 2.4.5, these ranged between administrative linkage, where interactions were purely focused on administrative elements, through to the fourth state – integrative linkage - where HR and the unit are truly engaged in a reciprocal relationship and HR is considered formally and informally integral. Further developing this work, Buller (1988) suggests that it may be necessary for firms within dynamic environments to have higher levels of integration than those in stable environments.

Yet, two decades after the emergence of SHRM, it was argued that little coherence in the field had been achieved (Wright, 2000). Wright and Boswell (2002) articulated that the segregation of veins of HRM literature, although commendable and advancing each stream significantly, had held back advancements in the fertile intersection between macro and micro environments. Wright and McMahan (1992) argued the early integration of strategy and HRM lacked delineation coming into the early 1990s, making it problematic to distinguish HRM from SHRM. A lack of theoretical advancement was singled out as the cause.

Wright, Dunford, et al. (2001) and Lengenick-Hall and Lengenick-Hall (1988) had commented that HR scholars and strategy scholars were not well acquainted with each other's literature. Becoming versed in one another's work was argued to be beneficial for both parties. Wright and McMahan (1992) stated “[m]uch of the writing in the field of SHRM has been concerned with either practical advice or presentation of empirical data. Without good theory, the field of SHRM could be characterised as a plethora of statements regarding empirical relationships and/or prescriptions for practice that fail to

explain why these relationships exist or should exist” (p. 297). Integration using literature from the strategic management domain (cf. Hofer & Schendel, 1978; Miles & Snow, 1978; Porter, 1980), was produced primarily to the ends of producing both conventional and practitioner orientated works advising that HR practices be linked to business strategy (cf. Martell, Carroll, & Gupta, 1992; Miles & Snow, 1984; Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

Earlier calls from the likes of Evans (1986) outlined competitive performance as a strategic HRM imperative - the rationale being that strategic management itself works towards specific outcomes. The specificity of such ends was argued to be greatly lacking for SHRM. Indeed, the field of SHRM had experienced delays between theoretical positions and empirical investigation – with mixed results stemming from what empirical work had been completed (Chadwick & Cappelli, 1999). Stronger theoretical positions were called for (Butler et al., 1991; Ferris & Judge, 1991) as a means to pave the way for more unified direction for empirical work.

2.5.3 Answering calls for stronger theoretical positions within SHRM

Wright and McMahan (1992) examined six theoretical positions that they believed could help address deficits in theoretical foundations, from which the resource-based view of the firm was put forward. Continued calls to employ the resource-based view ensued (Boxall & Purcell, 2000; Wright, Dunford, et al., 2001). By the mid-1990s major empirical research efforts had turned towards a focus on measuring firm performance (Pérez, 2012). HRM literature’s turn towards resource based logics incorporates the social complexity of human capital, “suggest[ing] that socially complex resources

and capabilities should be among the most important sources of sustained competitive advantages for firms” (Barney & Arikan, 2001, p. 71).

Early research, such as Womack, Jones, and Roos (1990), had indirectly started to paint a picture of more versatile worker activities and HR policies acting as a form of competitive advantage. They observed that in the automobile industry, amongst the firms that had high quality and cost leadership, quality ‘group dynamics management techniques’ were also visible. These plants used skilled communities of employees who were trained in team work as a means to resolve complex problems (Womack et al., 1990).

MacDuffie (1995) also used the automotive industry to test HR practices as distinct bundles of high commitment work systems (extensive training and contingent compensation) as predictors of performance. These early works had perused questions of whether human resource strategies – “defined as internally consistent bundles of human resource practices” - had contributed to the effectiveness of the firm. However, there remained a lack of clarity surrounding the questions of *how* and *why* (Dyer & Reeves, 1995, p. 656).

2.5.3.1 The resource-based view

Strategic management research has focused around the central question of “why do some firms persistently outperform others?” (Barney & Arikan, 2001, p. 124). Wernerfelt’s (1984) resource-based view of the firm (RBV), and the subsequent works of Remelt (1984), Dierickx and Cool (1989), and - notably - Barney (1991) looked beyond the economic explanations of performance, that focused on external environmental dynamics such as opportunities and threats (Caves & Porter, 1977; Porter, 1980) to view the impact of internal firm

idiosyncrasies that represent the firm resources that constitute strengths and weaknesses. While early strategic management scholars (Andrews, 1971; Ansoff, 1965) had given balanced attention to internal and external dynamics, the influence of Porter (1980) had resulted in a shift away from equal attention towards external factors alone (Butler et al., 1991). This accordingly constituted a shift away from investigating the internal and idiosyncratic resources that are non-substitutable, valuable, immobile, rare and inimitable (Barney, 1991).

However, with the RBV being proliferated widely in the 1990s, other fields outside of the strategic management domain began to be influenced by such theoretical and empirical work (Barney & Arian, 2001). HRM empirical research accordingly began a dedicated effort to investigate how elements of HRM impacted organisational performance outcomes. This research sought to link HR practices (called High Performance Work Systems or High Performance Work Practices) to the strategic management domain (Wright & Boswell, 2002), and began to constitute a significant and continued body of work.

2.5.3.2 SHRM and performance

One of the highly influential early works within the field of SHRM stemmed from Huselid (1995), who from a sample of just under a thousand firms showed relationships between HR practices and financial performance. An extensive array of subsequent research has grown to build on these causal relationships (cf. Wright & Boswell, 2002), with the relationship between

HRM and organisational performance well conveyed (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006).

2.5.3.3 Introducing part two

As I will articulate, assessments of the literature largely depend on epistemological positions from which the assessments stem. To frame the overall status of the literature, and the gaps within the literature from which my research questions are derived, I move to an assessment of the literature. Such assessments are drawn from a diverse body of scholars who come from different ontological positions, yet also share common concerns towards SHRM. Moving into the next section, I will illustrate what has been argued to advance methodological and empirical gaps within the literature.

PART 2 – ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE

2.6 Assessment of the literature

2.6.1 Introduction

Within this section I move from illustrating the scope and findings of the extant literature towards assessing it as the basis for the development of my research questions. After I review various clusters of assessments made towards the state of SHRM literature, I will focus on four areas where it has been argued more attention is required. These constitute the framework I articulated in the introduction. These cover:

1. Incorporating diverse research methods (Section 2.7)
2. Incorporating multiple levels of analysis (Section 2.8)
3. Attending to within-firm stakeholder variability (Section 2.9)
4. Accounting for actor agency (2.10)

2.6.2 Assessments of the literature by clusters of scholars

A literature review of SHRM scholarship by Pérez (2012) noted that the assessments of extant SHRM literature cover a spectrum of “significant progress hav[ing] been made, to dismal extant results [which are seen] as inconclusive and lacking any casual implications” (p. 30). He asserts that such evaluations are by and large a result of the commentators aligning themselves to their tradition – i.e., the strongest censure stemming from those within traditions sceptical of positivist positions. He goes on to list the blocks of scholars attributed to a tradition, and their subsequent assessment of the direction of the literature. Such variance exhibited within any block of scholarship is of course to be expected, given one’s epistemological and ontological positions, and subsequent logic and acceptance of truths that stem from such positions.

However, providing a brief overview of this spectrum here is useful in two respects. First, it offers a concise impression of the differing positions within the domain. Kuhn (1970) argues normal science must tirelessly venture to bring theory and fact towards nearer agreement. To do so however, it is important to understand the varied positions that not only represent respective truths, but the way these truths are unveiled. Anomalies arise through both ‘novelties of fact and novelties of discovery’, exposed in part through the advancements of instrumentation (Kuhn, 1970). As a part of the “institutional mechanism for shifting warranted beliefs” (Coats, 1969, p. 28), awareness of divergent beliefs – dominant and otherwise – is beneficial. The second reason is that SAP largely rejects the notion of duality – as already discussed in

section 2.3. Therefore, in commencing this second part of Chapter 2, an ideal starting point is to outline an understanding of the spectrum of assessments of the literature by clusters of scholarship before illuminating the assessments that have underpinned the development of my own research questions.

In clarifying assessments of the varied bodies of scholarship with the HRM-SHRM field, Pérez (2012) outlines both encouraging and critical assessments of the literature articulated by varied groups of scholars. His categorisation is a useful overview from which to frame the broad assessment of the status of SHRM. Accordingly, I will use Pérez's (2012) assessment categories as the basis of my own overview.

2.6.2.1 Positive assessments of SHRM literature

Assessments that have the strongest positive perceptions of the agenda have been categorised as advocates of empiricist agendas. Assessments by Combs et al. (2006) in their meta-analysis, as well as evaluations by Becker and Huselid (2006) contend that the literature shows SHRM and performance has been proven beyond a doubt. Consequently, they advocate progression of the field through continued refinement of measurement. This essentially entails continuing to establish cumulative knowledge (Becker & Gerhart, 1996) while looking towards more precise measurement (Gerhart, 2007; Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, & Snell, 2000). Such an approach from this camp is seen as the best future path for the field (Pérez, 2012).

In another grouping classified as optimistic, a collection of scholars (Paauwe & Boon, 2009; Wall & Wood, 2005) takes a more cautious approach in their assessments. Here, interpretation of the evidence has been assessed as

showing a much weaker relationship between HRM and performance. More work is advocated by these scholars to resolve doubts - yet the results to date are seen as encouraging. Wall and Wood (2005), for example, argue that the evidence does not present a link, yet there is strong reason to believe such a link should exist. Their works call on a 'big science' approach to resolve this.

2.6.2.2 Critical assessments of SHRM literature

Pérez (2012) also outlines five clusters of critical SHRM assessment. The first concentration of censure stems from critical management scholarship, where these academics have largely denounced HRM as 'management rhetoric' (Keenoy, 1999; Legge, 1995b). The second cluster encompasses post-structuralism (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Townley, 1993, 2005). Pérez (2012) notes that in this case, scholars have denounced HRM as an 'identity control mechanism'. The works of these authors share some common connections with SAP scholarship - in that Townley (1993) has employed Foucault in her work on power and knowledge, while Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) approached their work on identity by incorporating micro activities and social structures.

In the case of the former, Foucault is a seminal social theorist from which SAP draws theoretical positions, while in the latter the approach taken towards identity and the socially situated activities has garnered much interest in SAP. The third group of criticisms towards HRM scholarship outcomes has come from critical realists (Pérez, 2012). Commentary towards scholarship from this quarter has highlighted simplistic handlings of causality and issues with the

theoretical underpinnings of research directions (Edwards & Wright, 2001; Hesketh & Fleetwood, 2006).

The last group is referred to as ‘analytical HRM’ (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007). As a number of these scholars have been in the SHRM domain for a significant amount of time, they have presented levels of scepticism at various points about the sustainability of dominant research agendas that examine links with performance. These concerns extend to the methodological weaknesses in addressing HRM and SHRM (Boxall, 2012, 2014; Wright & Gardner, 2003; Wright & Nishii, 2013) and the lack of sound models to show the impact of HRM, despite the significant amounts of time that have been devoted to SHRM (Guest & Conway, 2011; Purcell & Kinnie, 2007). This body of scholarship in many respects appeals to the practicality of SAP, and the desire to address deeper and richer elements of HRM.

The overall critical assessments illustrated above are situated across many separate areas - differing in focus and degree. While critical concerns have not concentrated on mass around a single umbrella of unified direction for remedy, commentary across the spectrum does share common themes. As I will illustrate in the following sections, SAP has shared many of these concerns when addressing scholarship in the strategic management space. It is not surprising that strategic management’s younger cousin, SHRM, arrived at a not too dissimilar position – albeit somewhat later.

SAP has made strong inroads into questions traditional scholarship had not been able to address; establishing an extensive agenda. Within the broader HRM field in which Björkman et al. (2014) have illustrated, many

fundamental similarities of the SAP agenda are called for within elements of HRM. With Björkman et al. (2014) putting forward their HRM-as-practice agenda, they have presented strong arguments that SAP approaches are beneficial when attending to the intersection of role theory and SHRM, and more particularly, how strategy is done.

This agenda has been specifically attentive to understanding the strategic elements of HRM better. Namely, gaining a better understanding of the actions that constitute strategic activity, and a desire to understand how the actions of strategy emerge as they do. Such an intersection is where my study is placed, and I will now assess the literature within the four intended areas of contribution. I start with the first of my four contributions – incorporating diverse research methods.

2.7 Incorporating diverse research methods

2.7.1 Issues with dominant research methods

Over the last two decades, calls seeking alternative research methods have emerged within the broader HRM discipline. Many of these calls have argued the value of perusing alternative paradigms of enquiry, which in turn requires the utilisation of alternative methods attached to differing epistemological and ontological approaches (Brewster, 1999; Ferris, Hall, Royle, & Martocchio, 2004; McKenna, Singh, & Richardson, 2008; Mendenhall, 1999). Other scholars have directed their colleagues towards methodology approaches specifically (Gerhart, Paauwe, Guest, & Wright, 2013; Guest, 2011; Heavey et al., 2013; Paauwe, 2009). Many methodological challenges within HRM and SHRM have striking similarities to challenges found in other areas of

management (Jackson et al., 2014), as too does the entrenchment of HRM's dominant positivist paradigm (Brewster, 1999; Mendenhall, 1999). Within strategic management scholarship, the pursuit of SAP's agenda has however offered recourse – either in part or in full – to address several epistemological and ontological concerns. Yet, generally with SHRM and HRM, pleas regarding non-positivist scholarship have largely failed to result in actual contributions.

This section will review such HRM appeals, and the dearth of methodological approaches within the literature. This is done with the intent of justifying the value of the research methods employed within this thesis. I will be building upon approaches that are called for within the literature - but more importantly offer the ability to attend to research questions that have been neglected.

Undoubtedly in some cases, such neglect stems from dominant ontological approaches not being well suited to address such questions (c.f McKenna et al., 2008), while in other cases, ontological perspectives are closed off to the insights of other positions. Brewster (1999) notes, “like the fish’s knowledge of water, these researchers not only see no alternatives but do not consider the possibility that there could be any” (p. 49).

My intent within this section is not to argue one epistemology over another, nor challenge the value and contribution of aggregate clusters of ontological groupings. Rather, stemming from the pragmatism of SAP, and avoiding being rooted in duality, my research questions seek to fill a space that the dominant epistemological and ontological positions have not. All epistemologies and ontologies have embedded assumptions of the social world they observe, and

extensive scholarly attention has been directed towards arguing the benefits and weaknesses of these. Determining if a screwdriver is better than a hammer is not a position I argue; rather, my attention is directed towards identifying what tool best answers the research question at hand.

Mintzberg and Lampel (1999b) use the metaphor of blind men each feeling out parts of an elephant, and relating what they are feeling to what they understand from their own experiences – each missing details from another part of the elephant that may help them to understand what they are actually feeling. As they note: “we are the blind people and strategy formation is our elephant” (p. 21). Like the broader strategic management domain coming into the new millennium, HRM positions are steeply embedded in quantitative methodologies. Their choice of tool – variations of screw drivers if you will – like any tool, will eventually be limited by the properties of its functionality. At such a point, a new tool or paradigm of thought becomes useful.

Paauwe (2009), for example, notes the limited – yet legitimate – value of reverting back to the mantra of challenging the positivist paradigm without putting forward alternatives. As a means of prefacing my subsequent positions relating to methodological approaches, criticisms of positivist positions are intended to be contextual. My criticisms apply to the continued employment of such many positivist methods in areas where other non-positivist positions may potentially advance our understanding due to better alignment between question and method. Such criticisms are intended to be surgical, rather than represent a blanket assessment.

In respect to our understanding of the lived experiences of HR practitioners and those that interact with them, we still know very little (Björkman et al., 2014). We also know very little about how the realities of one business unit are different to others (Björkman et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2014), and accordingly what being strategic entails within these different simultaneous realities. A particularly well-suited approach to understanding more about these varied realities is for the researcher to be a part of these realities.

Methodological approaches directed towards accessing the experiences of these varied realities, and phenomena surrounding them (McKenna et al., 2008), offers a means of redress. Simply put, in this context, despite the pervasiveness of using a screwdriver, it does not necessarily represent the best tool for this job.

Such a position does not promote exclusion, as in doing so, one can also attend to the problems that positivist scholarship has been trying to address as well. One of my contributions – multiple levels of analysis for example, as discussed below in section 2.8 – was arguably conceived with positivist scholarship in mind. Yet, while there are numerous applications for this in the variance testing of particular HR practices, and their influence on performance, there is also considerable utility employing this notion within qualitative frameworks as a means to address identified gaps in the literature - such as what Jackson et al. (2014) referred to as *dynamic and reciprocal processes*.

2.7.2 Assessment of HRM qualitative scholarship

I will start my assessment of the extant literature of research methods by noting the low number of qualitative studies undertaken across the domain. This is something my study aims to address. For example, in Purcell's (1999) review of studies attending to best practice and best fit, he criticises the conclusions that these studies draw - based on methodological concerns. He argues that methodological challenges, and even misalignments, are entrenched within these bodies of work. Purcell's (1999) concluding remarks note³: "this is less a statement of the obvious, since for years it has been ignored, but more an injunction to provide tools of analysis for both process and content in establishing the link between strategic change and HR" (p .38).

Purcell's statement has continued to hold true in subsequent critical evaluations. In a comprehensive review of HR articles, Boselie et al. (2005) remark that in spite of Purcell's (1999) call for greater utilisation of qualitative research methods, research that employed quantitative survey methods all but dominated the domain. Very recent HRM agendas such as Jackson et al. (2014) illustrate that the abatement of calls for qualitative approaches continues, as contributions still remain low. HRM scholarship stemming from the United States has predominately embraced positivist paradigms (McKenna et al., 2008). The attention of such work has therefore focused on cause and

³ Purcell was remarking on a core strategic management principle discussed by Johnson and Scholes (1997) that concisely articulates a central element of his thesis. This was the importance of integrating HR policies with organisational strategy and strategic change. The significance being that the outcome of such integration in turn produces employees who can block or enable future strategic change. This alludes to the nexus of people, process and outcome being reflexive.

effect and statistical application that result in linear thinking (Brewster, 1999; Mendenhall, 1999).

In understanding how the formulation and implementation of strategy occurs we must consider different business units' contextual realities and employee group involvement. A better way to view this process is not through a linear snap shot – which may omit many of the people within the process as the picture is taken, but rather through a longitudinal map that illustrates and explains the erratic path to such outcomes (Langley, 1999). This approach focuses on the steps of the journey in arriving at a destination, rather than the destination itself (Cook & Brown, 1999). Jackson et al. (2014) have called for practice-friendly research including SAP as “the reliance on surveys that ask anonymous respondents to answer generic questions is pervasive and problematic” (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 36). Achieving greater intimacy with participants through qualitative methods is required to achieve new insights (Jackson et al., 2014). This can complement the dominant line of scholarship that attends to testing variance theories (Langley, 1999).

Complex phenomena surrounding the decision to implement a change, and how the subsequent change comes about over time, can be highly fluid and contextual in nature (Eisenhardt, 1989b; Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1992). It is precisely for these reasons that context is embraced within qualitative research methods (Langley, 1999; Pettigrew, 1992; Yin, 1994). However, within scholarship that addresses HR strategic implementation, studies have largely used survey methods (cf. Guest & Conway, 2011; Huselid et al., 1997) in which results are presented at the organisational level (Woodrow & Guest,

2014). In a recent study, Woodrow and Guest (2014) claim their work provides methodological contribution to the literature based on their study using mixed methods. Their argument for this contribution rests with their study varying from the extensive amounts of survey based quantitative scholarship. They further comment that such an approach enabled the use of multiple data sources, and accordingly a methodological contribution.

Jackson et al. (2014), paradoxically to their calls for new research methods, note the dangers of an indefinite craving to pursue new methods within the dominant paradigm of variance models. Unchecked desires directed at increasing robustness of measurements, and stronger research design, has the ability to direct attention away from substitutive issues (Jackson et al., 2014). My proposed SAP lens to HRM enquiry constitutes 'new research methods' that can answer multi-level HRM research questions suited to the discovery of multi-level relationships (Renkema et al., 2016). Such an approach has received insufficient attention from HRM, and is required to unearth new insights into multi-level HRM beyond the often used methods of multi-level structural equation modelling (Renkema et al., 2016).

In the strategic management domain, the pursuit of such refinement of variance models was assessed to constitute the beginnings of a journey to a theoretical cul-de-sac by critical scholars such as Johnson et al. (2003a). Critical positions within the broader HRM scholarship draw parallels – albeit not united under the one umbrella that SAP has subsequently managed to establish. Ferris et al. (2004), for example, advocate the use of alternative paradigms from which they contend the limited dominant ontological

positions within the domain would benefit. McKenna et al. (2008) advocate this belief, but support the use of a mutually supportive approach which supports work within the broader agenda. Such a position is also shared by SAP – in that there is an opposition to duality. Ferris et al. (2004) argues the limited value by creating dichotomous streams of research, particularly ‘micro’ vs ‘macro’ opposition. They note there is little to be gained by creating artificial boundaries.

It is in this respect that SAP, and Bjorkman et al.’s (2014) HRM-as-practice agenda, promotes inclusiveness, rather than a micro-macro divide. SHRM has both micro issues and macro – increasing employee motivation in the case of the former, and organisational performance in the latter (Ferris et al., 2004). Accordingly, where role theory and SHRM are separate bodies of scholarship, both attend to areas surrounding strategy. While my research questions rest on the divide between these two bodies of scholarship, they pertain directly to strategic issues of HRM - both at the micro and macro. The cross fertilisation of various veins of scholarship advocated by Mintzberg and Lampel (1999b) (as a means of the blind men being able to describe the entire elephant) is something that HRM-as-practice certainly seeks to achieve – as does this thesis. Holistic research through the employment of qualitative methods offers a means for future refinements once broader work is established.

For example, Ostroff and Bowen (2016) have called for the reconceptualisation to measurement approaches within HRM systems - directing scholars to be mindful of higher contextual levels of analysis. Renkema et al. (2016) argue the value of using a qualitative case study to do

so. They argue that by doing so, two ends can be achieved. The first being obtaining a better understanding of “why relationships hold, or not”, while the second is what occurs after this is understood. Once establishing why relationships hold, the opportunity exists to “deepen the understanding of the dynamics underlying the relationship... [as to] create a nest environment in which other research methods and techniques can be applied to answer more-specific research questions within a holistic enquiry” (p. 241).

The employment of such approaches also aligns to the goals and objectives of the body of scholarship referred to as Analytical HRM (Boxall, 2014; Boxall et al., 2007). Early empirical contributions to using this practice approach have come from Pérez (2012), but to the best of my understanding this remains the only work. This vein of scholarship also embraces the inclusion of micro and macro issues. Boxall (2014) notes that he himself, along with John Purcell and Patrick Wright, have sought “a rigorous understanding of the contexts, processes and outcomes of managing work and people in organisations. [Analytical HRM therefore] aims to understand *what* managers do in HRM, *why* they do it, *how* they go about it and *who* benefits from it” (p. 581).

Methodologically, analytical HRM advocates improved methods, with the inclusion of multiple levels of analysis and multiple sources of data (Boxall, 2014; Paauwe, 2009). Boxall (2014) argued, methodologically, that it was time to look behind the curtain to see how the interpretation of policies is occurring, and this goes beyond simply counting practices through managers

reporting them. He argues for exploring a deeper level that incorporates psychological and social dynamics.

In regards to determining what *being strategic* entails to various stakeholder groups, moving beyond dichotomies of strategic or functional activity (Björkman et al., 2014) also coincides with analytical HRM logics and methodological requirements. There is a need to go deeper into psychological and social practices – what Boxall (2014) refers to as ‘behind the veil’. HR business partner competencies are increasingly being seen as overarching competencies (Caldwell, 2008) that are aligned to dealing with future contexts, strategic action and dynamic change (Buckley & Monks, 2004; Caldwell, 2008; Higgs & Rowland, 2000; Vloeberghs, 1998). Such rationale needs to be applied to the relationship and value between the HRF and their partners themselves. Caldwell (2008) notes that such elements are non-linear and emergent by construct, and accordingly are difficult to define and incorporate into positivist models. The resulting concern for epistemological adequacy of behaviour models addressing the development of business partners therefore emerges (Antonacopoulou & FitzGerald, 1996; Caldwell, 2008; Finch-Lees, Mabey, & Liefoghe, 2005; Le Deist & Winterton, 2005).

I seek to make two methodological contributions within my thesis. The first is to the general field, laying claim to the merit of a qualitative scholarship contribution – in the same manner as Woodrow and Guest (2014) claimed the value of their qualitative contribution. The utilisation of a finer grained alternative analysis has further been called for (Björkman et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2014; Renkema et al., 2016) as greatly needed.

Such finer grained alternative analysis have been sought in the form of rigorous case-study techniques by Renkema et al. (2016) as a means to uncover multi-level HRM performance connections that are contextually bounded, allowing “higher-order constructs [to] emerge over space and time” (p. 214). Such an approach takes steps towards addressing the reconceptualisation of HRM system measurement. These attend to the context attached with higher level analysis called for by Ostroff and Bowen (2016). Case study methods are regularly employed in SAP empirical research with rich methodological and theoretical resources available. The second methodological contribution I therefore make to the field is the application of a HRM-as-practice perspective (Björkman et al., 2014). This thesis would be only one of a few bodies of work to utilise such an approach with HRM and subsequently contribute to this nascent approach of HRM scholarship. Such an approach has conceptually presented value in its ability to address the interconnection between the HRM-performance link and the micro-structures that surround HR practices, the views of practitioners, and their behaviours (Renkema et al., 2016).

2.8 Incorporating multiple levels of analysis in HRM

2.8.1 Introducing assessments of multi-level analysis literature

This section focuses on an assessment of literature that surrounds the levels of analysis being used within HRM scholarship. This pertains to the need for HRM to employ multi-level analysis. Compared to research fields like strategic management, there has been a slow uptake within HRM to embrace multi-level perspectives (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009; Renkema et al.,

2016). Assessments of the literature from analytical HRM scholars argue that inattention to multiple levels of analysis runs the risk of misdirected interpretation of empirical work (Nishii & Wright, 2008). As a means of redress, Wright and Nishii (2013, 2007) put forward a model that attends to multiple levels of analysis, while also being largely compatible with the work of Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013). This has gathered traction, with some empirical application ensuing.

Yet, “despite a growing belief that multi-level research is necessary to advance human resource management’s understanding, there remains a lack of multi-level thinking – the application of principles for multi-level theory building” (Renkema et al., 2016, p. 204). Existing scholarship also entails the dominant application of top-down approaches to multi-level analysis (Renkema et al., 2017). Such top-down positions implicitly champion consistency of implementation, with variability of implementation by line managers treated as undesirable (Pérez, 2012).

Within this section, I will outline scholarship that has elicited concern surrounding the absence of multi-level analysis, or identified misalignments of multi-level approaches when they are used, before outlining specifically how my thesis will address these concerns. As outlined in section 2.3, SAP has used multi-level perspectives effectively in its scholarship (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), and such approaches lend themselves to the criticisms of the current state of multi-level analysis within HRM. My thesis contributes to scholarship by attending to these outlined concerns.

2.8.2 Planning and implementation

Within HRM, differences have been identified between intended and implemented HR practices (Keenoy, 1999; Khilji, 2002; Legge, 1995a; Purcell, 1999; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). Attending to the methodological implications from this distinction, Khilji and Wang (2006) isolated intended and implemented HR practices as a means to review the extent of their difference. This constituted a bridging of broader stakeholder inclusion and the movement from 'what HR practices are present' to a focus on the manner and quality in which they are applied (Guest, 2011). The early theoretical antecedents of such positions stem in part from strategic management positions, and have moved into SHRM.

In seeking to understand strategic formulation, the rationally planned and the emergent strategy explanations represent two divergent yet dominant positions within strategic management scholarship. These standpoints still influence many academic debates (Paroutis, Heracleous, & Angwin, 2013). The planned school - stemming from Chandler (1962) - positions the role of executive managers as those who plan, administer and coordinate. Here strategy is first a domain of the executive manager, and secondly a formal and planned activity in which executives who are provided with information make future decisions concerning resources. In terms of the manner in which strategy is developed, Barnard (1948) took a critical position against formal planning, referring to it as a "delusory exercise" (p.164). Up until the 1970s however, the role of formal planning "could do no wrong" (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 4). Mintzberg's works (Mintzberg, 1973, 1987a, 1987b, 1994; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999a;

Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) subsequently contributed heavily towards the emergent school of strategy.

Mintzberg and colleagues contended that strategies are not always formal or explicit. This body of literature argues that strategy is not a plan. Rather, it is patterns of activity that arise over time where “organisations develop plans for the future as they also evolve patterns of the past” (Mintzberg, 1994, p.24).

Emergent strategy therefore is far more inclusive of different paths and people, with formulation possible from varied directions including the bottom (Regnér, 2003). While this causes problems in identifying what activity is actually strategic (Westley, 1990; Whittington, 2003), strategic activities have been well-argued to go beyond those of activities of managers (Mantere, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2003).

Within HRM, Dyer’s (1985) positioning of *intended* and *actual* HRM drew from Mintzberg and colleagues, and positioned the creation of intended practices in the domain of top management. As within strategic management scholarship, the identification of gaps between intended and actual HRM practices emerged (McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997). In such implementations, consistency of implementation varied extensively, as did the quality of the implemented practice (McGovern et al., 1997).

Within subsequent scholarship, a misalignment between the purpose of the practice and the experience of employees was then identified (Truss, 2001).

Such positions lend themselves to the broad notion that senior managers design practices, but such practices are implemented at the line (Boxall, 2012; Boxall et al., 2007; Nishii & Wright, 2008; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007;

Truss, 2001). As identified in section 2.4.6, the role of line managers has been credited with variations between intended and actual implemented practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Purcell & Kinnie, 2007). As such, top-down positions of strategic practices may not manifest.

Scholarship within this domain has been undertaken through top-down and bottom-up processes. The overwhelming amount of multi-level analysis with HRM however incorporates top-down perspectives. Renkema et al. (2017) note in their extensive review of HRM multi-level analysis, “although many studies have conducted HRM-performance research at more than one level, few have gone beyond top-down empirical considerations, composition-based emergence, and two levels of analysis”.

The role of senior management’s contribution to the development of the HRF has received considerable attention (Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Guest, 1997; Macky & Boxall, 2007; Wright et al., 1994), yet in line with the SAP and HRM-as-practice agenda, the role and importance of HR managers’ relationships with other parties requires attention. The roles of middle managers and employees within the HRM process have also remained underestimated (Nishii et al., 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013). An increasing body of literature linking the importance of these other actors to the success of HR strategy (Currie & Procter, 2001; Mayrhofer, Müller-Camen, Ledolter, Strunk, & Erten, 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) has emerged in conjunction with it being contended that there is a dearth of literature that examines the interactions across different levels of management in the operationalisation of HR (Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010a).

Brewster et al. (2013) make a strong argument that there now exists a need to link the 'who' and the 'how' together in understanding not only HRM policy design, but the development of the actual processes that accompany broader strategic policy.

In a comprehensive review of the field by Boselie et al. (2005), they found that the vast majority of research occurred at a single level of analysis.

Accounting for the drivers of strategic practices certainly must account for such practices and praxis extending beyond that of senior managers (see Mantere, 2005; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2003).

Mintzberg and Waters (1990) have also drawn attention to decision-making, arguing that decisions do not always precede organisational action. They contend that in some instances decisions to act simply do not exist. Rather, actions occur through many complex frameworks such as social systems. These occur without consensus and inadvertently snowball. Subsequently Mintzberg and Waters (1990) maintain it is through actions that we are best able to observe strategy, as action leaves an evidence trail that decisions may not always be able to provide.

2.9 Attending to within-firm stakeholder variability

2.9.1 Introducing assessments of within-firm stakeholder variability

This section focuses on assessments of within-firm stakeholder variability found within the literature. That is, accounting for the fact that individuals and groups within the same firm are not the same. Nishii and Wright (2007) argued a decade ago that little was known about the HR process that leads to

enhanced performance. They argued accordingly that it is not clear if “HR practices exert their effects through similar means across organisations... they most likely do not” (p. 6). While a small but growing number of articles addressing HRM-performance relationships have begun to use multi-level analysis (Renkema et al., 2017), when observing interactions between the HRF and business units, we have witnessed little progress. Actions, attitudes, foundational beliefs, and relationship structures that represent the various non-HR/HR groupings offer the potential to represent rich areas of difference (Björkman et al., 2014).

Subsequently, while the practices and praxis between HR practitioners and various organisational business units may vary, the literature seemingly does not generally account for this (Nishii & Wright, 2007, 2008). Jackson et al. (2014), for example, reviewed 154 relevant studies to determine that only 30 looked at environmental factors as antecedents of HRM systems. They note that despite early HR research being acutely mindful of context, and the importance of internal and external environmental factors in the creation and design of HR systems, such environmental factors within contemporary scholarship have now largely been relegated to control variables.

Indeed, the positivist positions of the traditional literature have left an enduring legacy of organisations being treated homogeneously (Parkes & Borland, 2012). As a result, Jackson et al. (2014) note that in spite of sizeable inter-firm variability, little is still known about how and when HR systems emerge. I argue, given the dominance of inter-firm studies, that the state of the literature’s understanding of intra-firm - or within-firm variability - is

significantly less. This has occurred along two parallel lines. In the first case, scholarship looking at the strategic integration between the HRF and BUs has largely treated such relationships as homogeneous - neither illustrating the differences in interaction, nor explaining how these come about. Second, the manner in which practices are formulated and implemented for different employee groups, and the practice variability that potentially comes from this, has not adequately been investigated (Jackson et al., 2014). Both elements present gaps within our understanding of SHRM and HR role theory, which will be illustrated within this section.

I therefore undertake this section with the intent of specifically addressing intra-unit and employee group variability. I will assess the literature surrounding both areas, and then frame such assessments in relation to my study. This section then links to section 2.6, which addresses multiple-levels of analysis. There is inevitably an overlap given the nature of the two areas. This section however is focused specifically on the business units and employee groups – representing aggregate practitioner’s variability.

2.9.2 Intra-unit variability

The discourse surrounding within-firm variability largely addressed within the literature has not framed variability as something in need of being investigated and understood, but rather as something in need of being overcome. Such dialogue has come from the dominant positivist positions within the scholarship, and has come about because of the challenges variability has presented - given the measurement and analytical approaches employed with positivist scholarship. While perspectives on intra-firm variability may vary

between differing positivist camps of scholarship, a commonality between all groups has seen calls for redress directed towards finding a remedy for an ailment.

Two dominant approaches to address this ‘ailment’ are through more thoughtful selection of measurement methods (e.g. selection of participant groups), or through statistical means. Such methodologies therefore do not seek to better understand why variance exists, nor its role in the impact of the formulation and implementation of HR strategies. For example, strategies for single informant designs within positivist studies have suggested keeping the empirical setting smaller, such as to single locations (Arthur & Boyles, 2007). The understandable and legitimate rationale here relates to minimising the potential for measurement error (Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, et al., 2000). Within studies, respondents are therefore not forced to face the daunting task of assessing the entire organisation from which uncertainty between different stakeholders - given the large scope of an organisation - may result in response variability (Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, et al., 2000; Seidler, 1974).

Further substantive discourse surrounding intra-firm variability is directed towards statistical remedies. Arthur and Boyles (2007) ask the question: what happens when data that is collected from multiple sources who have similar knowledge levels, disagree on their assessments of HR systems? They note the answer in many cases has been to address random measurement error (Gerhart, Wright, Mahan, et al., 2000; Gerhart, Wright, & McMahan, 2000).

While such discourse is undoubtedly potentially valuable, and certainly highly

relevant given the paradigm of thought, it also brings to bear the neglect of enquiry in other respects.

Such inattention surrounds taking a step towards understanding *how* HR strategies and systems are perceived by different business units, what variations of actions occur between different units because of this, what contextual elements drive or surround variations of action, and, *how* possible variations emerge – particularly in relation to *being more strategic*. In the traditional strategic management literature, little empirical attention has been directed towards “the way strategists act within their worlds”. Yet such understanding is certainly required (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 83). Looking at how strategic episodes unfold within different business units is fully consonant of this pursuit. The need to do so in HRM stems from scholarship that has shown that unified directions of shared understanding, between units and within units, do not necessarily exist – even with a single function such as the HRF itself (Pritchard, 2010). HR scholarship further suggests that HR roles may accordingly evolve over time (Welch & Welch, 2012).

Within-firm variability is recognised as under-researched, and is subsequently in need of redress (Jackson et al., 2014). The implicit assumptions that single organisational respondents correctly represent the experiences and opinions of all organisational members when reviewing HR practices can result in missing the variations that moderate the HR performance link (Nishii & Wright, 2008). Such variability is inherently linked to the importance and impact of contextual differences (Jackson et al., 2014). The complexity of the HRF in

itself is an illustration of this (Welch & Welch, 2012). It is “a multi-role unit, answering to multiple constituencies” (Stiles & Trevor, 2006b, p. 62). Role conflict may emerge given the context surrounding dealing with these multiple constituencies (Björkman et al., 2014; Caldwell, 2003; Welch & Welch, 2012).

Yet, context remains largely unaddressed, and when addressed, the focus has been on inter-organisational enquiry. Without explicit attention to within-firm variation at the individual and group level, variability may well “erroneously be considered ‘noise,’ or lead to incomplete or inaccurate conclusions” (Nishii & Wright, 2008, p. 5). Caldwell (2008), for example, found the importance of context in research investigating competency models. He showed competency models were perceived as less effective in facilitating strategic linkages and HR-organisational business partners. Contextual specific issues such as degree of change in the HRF, consistency of implementation, centralisation of HR and the transactional HR composition all had bearing on assessments. Truss et al.’s (2002) data and model sees them viewing the HRF as “situated with a dynamic context” (p. 61). Based on their findings, they argue that telling the HR department to be ‘more strategic’ as prescriptive exhortations have done, omits the complexity of the situation. They note:

[A]chieving this involves far more than the HR director simply deciding that the department will ‘be more strategic’. Rather, we should view HR departments as situated within a dynamic context, where the will to act strategically is but one element within a complex web of structures, interactions and reinterpretations that are played out on a daily basis in organisational life, and that will significantly influence the degree of success the department has in adopting a more strategic role (p.61).

Such research further lends itself in support of the importance of context in the workings of strategic business partnerships, and the influence on strategy.

Studies like Wright, Gardner, and Moynihan (2003), for example, have certainly argued for and embraced addressing variability. Their comprehensive study of 50 business units within the same firm was squarely aimed at addressing arguments for measurement error. Their extensive sampling of over five thousand respondents within 50 business units also used multiple levels of analysis (i.e., drivers, warehouse employees etc.). While highly valuable, this research focuses on the averaging out of units, rather than embracing exploration of the differences that exist. Certainly, such scholarship approaches are useful for linking HR practices to firm performance, however, they have not sought to address the finer grained contexts of how different approaches are taken, between different units – particularly the process of this.

If we are to treat context in degrees of granularity, inter-firm and macro contexts are coarser by necessity. Work such as that of Wright et al. (2003), while attending to business units within the same firm, has emphasised contextual refinement of the macro level. As already stated, while such outcomes of scholarship have shown firm level outcomes despite intra-firm variability, the level of context shown still speaks to embracing homogeneous outcomes rather than alternative paths to outcomes. For example, Jarzabkowski (2004), within SAP scholarship, has indicated finer grain contexts exist, and related them to the recursive and adaptive tendencies of the doing of strategic work. In addition to the macro level of context, she

illustrates both the within-firm, micro-context, and actor cognition levels of context (see Figure 2.4).

The implications of the aforementioned bodies of work for this study are that contextual parameters at different levels of granularity illustrate different tensions and pressures being placed on organisational groups or members. As such, these contexts play into the undertaking of strategic activity. At a coarser level, context by design can only clump larger elements together. At a finer level, we are presented with the ability to observe variations between units, practitioner groups, and individual actors.

Figure 2.4: Recursive and adaptive characteristics of the micro-macro contexts

| Level of analysis | Recursive tendencies | Adaptive tendencies |
|---|--|--|
| Macro context: competitive and institutional forces | Fully institutionalized social structures Dominant social institutions Stable regulatory, economic, and social conditions Stable competition | Early, growth stage of market Mature, saturated stage of market Pre-institutional social structures Plural social institutions Changing regulatory, economic, and social conditions Hyper-competition |
| Within-firm, micro-context | Highly political Discrete, fragmented subcultures Homogenous communities Low links between communities Strong, singular culture Dominant logic Bureaucratic, hierarchical, and divisionalized structures Top-down strategy-making Strong operating routines Low absorptive capacity | Diverse communities of practice Social integration between communities Intrapreneuring Internal venturing Peripheral involvement in strategy Knowledge distribution and transfer Cellular, network, and heterarchical structures Flexible, patching approach to structure |
| Actor cognition | Narrow assimilative structures Lower reflexivity Restricted accommodative zone of interest Narrow skill, competence, and knowledge base | Broad assimilative structures Higher reflexivity Wider accommodative zone of interest Broad skill, competence, and knowledge base |

Interplay between levels

Tensions between recursive and adaptive characteristics

Taken from Jarzabkowski (2004)

I have already discussed the notion that SAP treats strategy not as something a firm has, but rather something done by the actors of a firm. In this light, the role of context is highly applicable given the number of variables involved. For example, groups within an organisation that have higher degrees of fragmentation and detached subcultures may be prone to recursive strategic action as isolated groups have difficulty building concessions (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Knights & McCabe, 1998; Martin, 1992). For positivist research this may present possible measurement issues and result in limiting enquiry to one particular business unit as a means of addressing these measurement issues - hiding understanding.

Literature discussed within section 2.3 by Marin et al. (2016) showed distinct variations of praxis and practice occurring when different organisational groups implemented a critical strategic objective within their organisation. While four within-firm organisational groups had illustrated minor variations of praxis and practices, one illustrated substantially higher variation – so much so that it was said to constitute an entirely different implementation. Socially situated contextual subtleties brought about these variations, despite many broader contextual issues remaining constant for the entire organisation. Such variations were linked to organisational level implications, and came about in part because of actions other units were taking.

Similarly, as already discussed in section 2.3, Ambrosini et al. (2007) not only identified strategic differences between two organisational units tasked with the same objective, but used the resourced-based view as a means to determine the elements of superior performance. Deductive and inductive

strategy making approaches (Regner, 2005; Regnér, 2003, 2008) as well as creative adaptations in the doing of strategic work when applied through Jarzabkowski's (2004) context model, show the between-unit variation possible with the HRF – BU relationship, and how they affect, or are affected, by other with-firm organisational units.

While scant attention has been paid to contextual factors and phenomena at the organisational and unit-level (Renkema et al., 2016), scholarship has illustrated that contextual factors influence organisational-level adoption of HR practices (Renkema et al., 2016). For example, Peretz, Levi, and Fried (2015) showed how culture affected organisational outcomes. HR scholarship has also shown that HRF itself has had trouble reconciling becoming strategic, with considerable variation of what this means, being shown to occur within the same organisation by HR personnel and business partners alike. Discussed in section 2.4, Pritchard (2010) showed significant variations exist around what it means to *be strategic*. This stemmed in great part from business partners themselves being vague when defining and communicating such notions. Subsequently, divisions in the HRF emerged on the value of being strategic. In opposition to being strategic, administrative focused positionings were conceptualised as more concrete and valuable by one camp. If diverse role conflict is possible within one unit, the potential for this to occur between different units can be reasoned. Such divisions are applicable to strategic integration, and the relationship between the HRF and business partners.

Within HR scholarship, attending to strategic integration, and accounting for the varied interactions between the unit and the HRF has not been well

illustrated or understood. This is despite scholarship suggesting that such variations not only exist, but evolve and unfold within situated activity (Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 2002). For example, the line of work that has employed and progressed Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) typologies, while offering the potential to do so, has essentially not sought to account for the variability of SBU's strategic relationships within the same firm, nor understood the broader dynamics that surround these relationships. The typologies discussed in section 2.4.8, like typologies in general, suffer from being static (Björkman et al., 2014). As such they underestimate the possibility of role conflict, while oversimplifying the complexity of organisational behaviours (Stiles & Trevor, 2006b). Expanding on such typologies, investigating how such roles are enacted rather than only what roles are, constitutes value (Welch & Welch, 2012).

In the case of the line of work stemming from Golden and Ramanujam (1985), the focus has been on between-firm analyses, with such work, through various measurement techniques, reducing such relationships to homogenous organisational representations. This has omitted the potential of this model in many respects. That is: how do varied actors interact with each other within this context, what constitutes being strategic for business unit X and business unit Y, and how do these realities manifest in similar or varied activities between HR and each business unit? Elements relating to proactivity and reactivity could be central to strategic interactions between the HR-function and business partners. While proactivity has been viewed as a positive dynamic, and reactive as negative, both offer the potential of strategic

advantage (Brockbank, 1999). This is something the findings of Welch and Welch (2012) lend support to if we consider context that drives role expectations within different units.

Scholarship presents a good understanding of the difficulties of HR integrating into the strategic process, as this has received sizable attention (Bach, Kessler, White, & Harris, 2005; Boyne, Poole, & Jenkins, 1999; Jamrog & Overholt, 2004; Procter & Currie, 1999; Truss, 2003). However, this needs to extend to understanding *how* HR practitioners operate (Truss & Gill, 2009). I argue the variance of interactions between differing units and the HRF presents a means to achieve this. Expectant HR roles by business units, and the adherence of roles cannot be assumed to be the same (cf. Björkman et al., 2014), nor can homogeneous role expectation and enacted roles between units be assumed.

Scholarship on strategic integration has occurred through a number of typologies (cf. Baird & Meshoulam, 1988; Butler, Ferris, & Smith Cook, 1988; Dyer, 1985; Golden & Ramanujam, 1985), and has been important in unpacking the broad SHRM process (Truss & Gratton, 1994). Continued scholarship utilising Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) work has illustrated the conditions in which HR plays a strategic or operational role at the firm level, and within various strategic initiatives, such as CSR (Sarvaiya et al., 2015). What has yet to be illustrated however are finer grained explanations of how this occurs. While recent work such as Sarvaiya et al. (2015) certainly has advanced the magnification of granularity in how we view strategic interactions, focus has still remained on multiple firms. This has resulted in

not accounting for variations of strategic integration between different business-units of the same firm.

Certainly, in respect to Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) work, a focus on addressing content strategy rather than process strategy outcomes may have been a contributing factor to the direction this vein of scholarship has taken. However, Sarvaiya et al. (2015) has illustrated the successful employment of a finer grained analysis by using such a framework. Notwithstanding the delineation of content and process scholarship and the earlier concerns that Truss and Gratton (1994) had surrounding Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) model being too simplistic (while also being worthwhile), it can perhaps now be reframed. Such concerns centred around the use of *interaction* as a unit of analysis alone, and how this omits context.

While the argument for the importance of contextual understanding is central to my thesis, given the recent ontological diversity that has successfully used Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) model, I intend to address such concerns through further application of it. A numerical reduction of broad categories of interaction between the HRF and business units will struggle to capture context. However, seminal strategic literature of planned and emergent strategies (Mintzberg, 1973, 1987a, 1987b, 1994; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999b; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) favours observation of action over intended decisions, as a unit of analysis (Mintzberg & Waters, 1990). In an interruptive sense, interaction does not reduce or constrain context, rather it provides a gateway through which relevant contextual phenomena can be easily accessed.

The use of Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) model by Sarvaiya et al. (2015) has illustrated an application of this - while they were not focused on intra-unit variation, contextual concerns were embraced within their work. Further extensions in understanding such dynamics would contribute to the progress of Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) model through context, variability, and addressing the reflexive nature of it. Organisations can be viewed as complex systems which have reflexive interrelated elements within their systems (Ackoff, 1981). These are comprised of HRM philosophies and policies, and then, actual practices that constitute daily activities that occur within social and technological *processes*. These continually evolve (cf. Jackson et al., 2014; Schuler, 1992). Accordingly, this evolution cannot be assumed to be homogeneously progressing in the same direction, speed, and manner – influenced by the same contextual concerns - for all business units at the same cross-section of time, given the levels of context available (Jarzabkowski, 2004).

2.9.3 Variations of employee groups

Variation of practices that stem from various levels of contextual difference may also occur around different employee groups where different HRM systems are utilised. Scholarship investigating different employee segments, and the practices surrounding these different segments, has been largely absent from the literature (Boxall, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014). Within organisations not all employees necessarily contribute in the same manner (Huselid et al., 2005; Lepak & Snell, 1999b), while not all employees may be valued in the same manner (Boxall, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014; Lepak et al., 2006; Lepak &

Snell, 1999b). That is, not every employee may be treated as ‘unique and valuable’ (Lepak & Snell, 1999a; Siebert & Zubanov, 2009). While there is an overall absence of scholarship examining employee segmentation, there is a particular dearth that seeks to undertake what these differences are, and how these vary in terms of practices and daily HR activities (Boxall, 1996; Jackson et al., 2014).

In research investigating work systems within a large British retailer, Siebert and Zubanov (2009) found that distinct HR work systems were utilised for two categories of employees. Turnover levels within the organisation were found to be contingent on the type of work system used. Around 20% of the work force constituted full time workers who were managers and experienced employees. These employees were managed under a commitment work system, while the remaining 80% were under a secondary system. The secondary system entailed lower levels of pay, training and responsibilities, as well as flatter potential for pay and movement (Siebert & Zubanov, 2009).

Referring to the work of Siebert and Zubanov (2009), Boxall (2012) argues it is “unwise to generalise about HR practices from [other] sectors...., [yet] we should not, however, rule out lessons about how to improve HRM in different contexts that are formed at the level of general principle” (p. 175). Boxall (2012) proposes, as a first step towards addressing such issues, the need to identify the HR systems a firm has, and evaluate the fit within its unfolding circumstance. While I agree with this notion entirely, I simultaneously propose the need to also better understand how such systems come to be, and how the HRF deals with these on a strategic basis. This certainly can attend to what

practices are being used, but also seeks to understand *why* and *how*, focusing on? the broader dynamics that may explain the variations of interaction and strategic activity - beyond employees' groups simply having different needs.

In addition to the need to understand the practices within an HR system, it is also important to address the multiple HRM systems' co-existence together, and the dynamics of this co-existence (Jackson et al., 2014). This is where focusing on variability of action can be beneficial – as opposed to the unit of analysis being the intention (Mintzberg & Waters, 1990). In research by Ruiner, Wilkens, and Küpper (2013), it was shown that highly skilled knowledge workers themselves, rather than the firm, drove HR systems. Jackson et al. (2014) notes that these systems are not static, but despite this, little enquiry has looked at the reciprocal dynamics of different systems influencing each other, and the vertical and horizontal forces exerted by employees within these systems. Addressing this however requires what Boxall (2014) calls *going beyond counting practices*, to see not only what is done, but how it is done, where differences exist, and what strategic explanations and implications can be gauged from identified variations.

Within the setting of a commercial bank – where my empirical study takes place – such segmentation, at face value, appears highly relevant. Broadly, commercial banks cover an extensive array of activities and employee groups - from highly skilled areas in treasury and risk, to more customer centric domains such as the retail-banking arm. Additionally, support personnel also represent a spectrum of highly qualified IT security specialists, through to custodial and maintenance services. The business-units themselves represent

an array of contextual differences; internally, with their value and contributions to the bank, and externally, with the employment market conditions and the demand for personnel, along with the norms of banking practices. External drivers influence internal context (Truss et al., 2002), and internal context mitigates, or extenuates the need for the HRF to address units and segments differently.

Scholarship has also shown that the possibility exists for leadership styles within business units to influence the usefulness of HRM systems (Chuang, Jackson, & Jiang, 2016). In addition to this, highly skilled workers themselves may influence the construct of the HR system (Ruiner et al., 2013). This is subsequent to the influence of line managers outside of formal and strategic initiatives (Truss et al., 2002). The potential for variability within and between units is therefore highly likely. Yet, how this influences what *being strategic* entails, in terms of action and belief, is not yet well understood (Björkman et al., 2014).

Understanding how the variability of the HR/Business Unit/Employee group interactions influence the notion of *being strategic* and the actual activities this represents is a contribution my study seeks to make. These include what practices occur in the daily situated activities of these interactions, how they are undertaken, how they vary considering contextual elements of different business units, the HR systems used within some units and not others, and the value that may be placed on some groups of employees. Does this result in HR–business unit interactions being different? Do stronger political or social

capital ties result in homogenous approaches to HR actions, despite the role expectation to strategically segment needs and groups?

2.10 Assessments of actor agency in HRM

2.10.1 The Role of agency in implementation

Recognising managers as active agents as opposed to passive receivers of strategy, structure and change, who mould and modify initiatives (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Knights & McCabe, 1998; Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007; Whittington et al., 2003) offers a lens towards understanding the role actors play in influencing variance between intended and actual implementation. This is noteworthy as what is intended and what is implemented through HRM may be vastly different (Truss & Gratton, 1994; Wright & Snell, 1998). Björkman and Welch (2015) have called for HR research to investigate agency and actions in more detail. Elements of their agenda are intended to be addressed by research question one, while the implementation component is better attended to the realm of research question two. They note:

“In our view, a particularly fruitful avenue would be in-depth analyses of the agency and actions that HR managers take that ultimately determine how HR policies and processes are initiated and implemented” (p.145).

Offering explanations to the agency and action gap, a growing body of research outside of HRM shows the divergent paths implemented strategy can take. This research at face value offers the ability to conceptually extend Guest and Bos-Nehles' (2013) model and answer Björkman and Welch's (2015) call by attending to the paths and causes of variances in implementation. This

would also continue the empirical path of Woodrow and Guest (2014) by also understanding the implementation of practices. If indeed implemented HRM policies are not leading to the desired results, as indicated by Woodrow and Guest (2014), then a richer understanding of how this takes place is warranted, drawing upon other veins of strategic management literature or by changing the literature to do so. The way in which managers reacted in Woodrow & Guest's (2014) study illustrated elements or contexts that resulted in "poor implementation," and illuminated the significant role managers play in the implementation process. The need to then understand individual responses better in a way that can examine the sensemaking process and interpretive process, both cognitively and sociologically, aptly presents itself. After all, "organisations, as such, are not actors which can respond – people respond" (Stensaker & Falkenberg, 2007).

2.11 Research questions

In my assessment of the literature, I have established a number of assumptions and gaps within that need to be addressed. These were:

1. A lack of scholarship addressing within-firm variability. Specifically, this pertains to:
 - a. a lack of understanding surrounding the variability of HRM practices used between different business units in general;
 - b. a lack of general understanding surrounding the variability of strategic integration between different businesses within an organisation aligned to Golden and Ramanujam (1985)'s framework;

- c. a lack of understanding surrounding environments in which multiple role expectations are placed on the HRF, and how role tensions emerge and play out in strategic outcomes;
 - d. how tensions manifest in daily doing of strategic work between the HRF and business units;
 - e. and finally, given these elements, a limited understanding of contextual phenomena surrounding the interactions and relationships that aggregate business units have with HRM, to understand what being strategic entails, given such variability.
2. Lack of attention given within the literature to multi-level analysis in HRM. Specifically:
- a. Assumptions of top-down strategic implementation tend to guide much SHRM scholarship.
 - b. Such top-down positions provide inadequate explanations of complex HR systems, and the manner strategies emerge and are implemented within them.
 - c. Bottom-up positions require further understanding to be appropriately addressed.
 - d. Perceptions of HR practices may vary greatly between what is intended and what is implemented. Line managers have been found to influence such variation greatly.
 - e. Other managers, including middle managers, also have significant power to impact in the doing of strategy. As such these need to be addressed.

Incorporating these gaps within the literature into a system's view of an organisation, the research questions that guide this thesis are:

1: How strategic are HR practitioners in the development & implementation of practices across different business units?

2a: How does strategic integration occur between HR practitioners and business units?

2b: What factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business unit?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introducing the methodology

This chapter explains the research assumptions that underpin my thesis by reviewing my choice of research method, selection of my research setting, and the data collection and analysis approaches used within my research. The chapter begins with an overview of my research design (3.2), followed by an explanation of my research setting, which addresses how organisational and participant access were achieved (3.3). I then illustrate my single case framework (3.4) and provide the rationale for a single-case framework supporting my research questions. In section 3.5, I discuss my data collection process before providing an explanation of my data analysis procedures (3.6). Finally, I conclude with the ethical considerations of this research in section 3.7.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 SAP lens

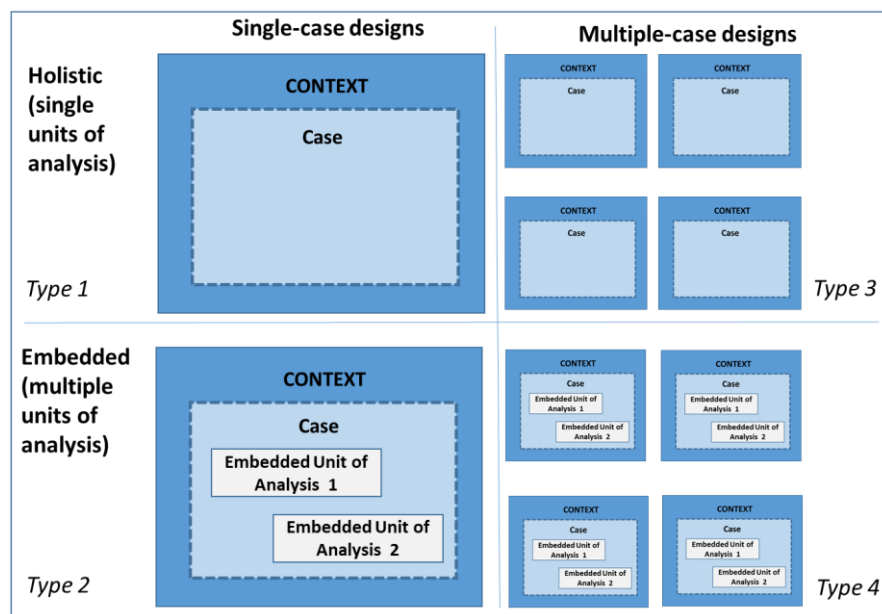
My research uses a SAP lens, which is consistent with research designs utilised in the broader practice domain, while also being the foundational basis for the aspirational HRM-as-Practice approach put forward by Björkman et al. (2014). Using a SAP approach within my research attends to arguments that a “[r]eliance on surveys that ask anonymous respondents to answer generic questions is pervasive and problematic” (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 36). Embracing practice-friendly research methods in SHRM is needed (Björkman et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2014) as a means to produce new insights that

capture the complexity of organisations' daily activities and the processes that fall within these (Jackson et al., 2014; Langley, 1999).

3.2.2 Single embedded case design

My research is conducted using a single embedded case study. This was used to understand the contextual dynamics occurring between different actors and actor levels (i.e. senior, middle and line management) within a single organisation. Being embedded within the case organisation allowed me to see 'behind the veil' of HR practices (Boxall, 2014). Yin (2014) illustrates the types of case designs possible in his matrix entitled 'Types of designs for case studies' (Figure 3.1). My selection of the embedded single case design (shown in Figure 3.1 in the bottom left quadrant and labelled as type 2) allows for multiple units of analysis – something argued for in HRM scholarship within my literature review.

Figure 3.1: Types of designs for case studies



Adapted from Yin (2014)

A qualitative case approach relies on inductive qualitative techniques to collect and analyse data. This approach has been successfully employed previously in SAP research such as Ambrosini et al. (2007), and draws from a significant body of practice-based qualitative methods (Orlikowski, 2002; Partington, 2000).

My research attempted to be as data driven as possible (Langley, 1999; Vogt, 1999), yet was acceptant of it being all but impossible to work from a 'blank slate' (Ambrosini et al., 2007; Gill & Johnson, 2010). The use of a case study method has been employed in other HRM research and has enabled in-depth gathering and exploration of data, capturing an assortment of perspectives within the same organisation (e.g. Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 1997). A case study method in particular enables holistic analysis of data, controlled within its single setting, allowing for the analysis of interrelated phenomena (Boxall, 1993; Dyer, 1992).

3.2.3 Linking my research design and the purpose of my research

My research's fundamental purpose was to comprehend strategic elements of HRM through a research design that allowed for understanding what 'being strategic means', not only for the HRM function, but across my case study organisation as a whole. Particularly, my research has been directed towards understanding the agency of HR practitioners as they make sense of strategically relevant issues within a single organisation, and the variations of practice and praxis that may occur around strategic activity. I sought to understand the multiple and often conflicting socio-cognitive perspectives occurring across various intergroup and extra-group levels. My research

design is therefore positioned towards being as open as possible to data, emergent ideas, and the interpretations of participants (Ambrosini et al., 2007; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994; Orlikowski, 2002). My case design allowed me to navigate the challenges of capturing data at multiple levels of analysis in an organisational setting that can present practical constraints.

3.2.3.1 Research participants and their own situated social reality

Interviews were undertaken and analysed by viewing participants as inherently being attached to their own unique context within their organisation. This sees participant discourse engrained within a participant's own situated social reality (Mantere, 2005). Such a mind-set requires unlocking knowledge pertaining to a participant's social reality using personal narratives to access their own social position (Bruner, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1988). Such a mind-set methodologically also requires accepting the subjectivity of contextual situations that surround participants.

3.2.3.2 Using participant narratives of practice

To access participants' socially situated realities, I treated their interviews as narratives of practice. A SAP lens entails the utilisation of methods to understand how actors "strategize in the course of their day-to-day activities" (Rouleau, 2010, p. 258). Narratives of practice is a biological research method (techniques used when studying living things) that draws on the experiences and realities of actors telling their stories (Rouleau, 2010). As a participant can weave their life experiences into their own discourse, narratives of practice can therefore capture a longitudinal perspective (Atkinson, 1998) of a research

participant. In my study, this allowed for the capturing of changing actor identities and role conflict based on previous work experience.

Through narratives of practice, participants are able to construct and relay their reality to the researcher by choosing to reflect on accounts of their past experiences while also being able to situate themselves in future contexts (Rouleau, 2010). Narratives are also knowledge (Bruner, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1988) possessed by the actor, within their own social situation, which requires unlocking (Mantere, 2005). While narratives of practice focus on individual actors, this approach does not accept that an individual is a perfectly rational actor (Rouleau, 2005). Rather, narratives of practice require subjective interpretations of the stories narrated (Rouleau, 2010). This means that my research has used a subjectivist epistemological approach which has treated participants' narratives as the way actors see their own reality, while the researcher looks to see what makes sense in a story (Mantere, 2005). This then entails a focus towards plausibility more than accuracy (Weick, 1995). For my study, this means that I did not categorise *what is and is not strategic* from text book definitions, nor reasoned if any narrated action was justified as being referred to as strategic by a participant (Mantere, 2005).

3.2.4 A linear but interactive research process

My process can best be described as a “linear but interactive process” (Yin, 2014); by initially planning a means to address my broad research questions, then accounting for a backwards and forwards evolution of my design and field work as issues presented themselves during the collection and analysis of my data. My planning approach sought to incorporate a way to uncover the

‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 1994), with a commitment to maintaining a rigour that includes validity, and preserving the chain of evidence (Yin, 2014).

3.2.4.1 Record keeping

After each participant interview I drafted a macro-narrative (Boje, 2001; Mantere, 2005) of each interviewee’s account as a means to position these narratives within the broader organisational setting (Mantere, 2005). When I experienced difficulties in connecting a significant level of uncovered situated activity, I went back to these notes to better place their narratives within their organisational setting. I was then able to better engage with the literature to counteract my emphatic mind-set (Patton, 1990) in addressing such a large amount of text – seeking a suitable means to address this coherently (Mantere, 2005). This was particularly helpful because of the numerous temporal references provided within narratives of before and after contextual situations that subsequently entailed organisational or participant evolution. The outcome was a review of my notes and participant narratives with the intent to view these actors within their own situations to see the world from their perspective. I then used the literature to find explanations and a framework to coherently structure my findings while still largely maintaining my initially planned broad research approach.

3.3 Research setting

The research setting for my thesis was a large Sri Lankan commercial bank. A detailed overview of the contextual factors surrounding my case setting is provided in Chapter 4. The fieldwork for my research was completed across all the business units of the bank; located at the head office, as well as at bank

branches. Jointly, this covered the retail and corporate banking services of the bank, in addition to the HRM department of the organisation – constituting eight business units in addition to the HRF. As such, my analysis covers all major operational areas of the bank, as well as different levels of analysis within those units (i.e. senior, middle and lien managers as well as employees).

3.3.1 Selection of research setting

Situating my study within the empirical setting of the financial services sector, and using this bank in particular, was initially not something I had conceived. However, the research setting was ultimately selected due to two factors. The first was that the bank had experienced a period of rapid transition and recovery from financial turmoil in 2008. From 2008 until the collection of my data the bank had subsequently undertaken significant strategic change to propel the organisation back into the top rungs of the Sri Lankan banking sector. The bank had experienced a significant reduction in its work force through voluntary redundancy as it sought to overcome financial pressure, but had built its workforce back up over successive years after successfully navigating the financial crisis and returning to profitability. As a result, there was a flurry of strategic activity - which from my position - potentially afforded a rich environment to understand the relationship between HRM and the broader organisation relating to strategic action.

The second aspect that made this organisation attractive was the importance of human capital to the bank. The financial services sector in general places a noteworthy importance on human capital, (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997), yet

the nature of the industry also requires significant attention beyond human capital to financial capital. The way this organisation balances these two positions as a source of competitive advantage offered a potentially rich case environment for my study. The three underlying sources of competitive advantage noted in the resource-based view (Barney, 1991) stem from physical capital, organisational capital and human capital. Here, I saw merit in the ability to view the differences between the bank's stated strategic positions, and the actual actions that occur in practice. This would potentially address the illustrated tensions between what HRM has prescriptively presented as aspirational and ideal, and actual HRM rhetoric and practices (Caldwell, 2001).

3.3.1.1 A research setting supporting variance

Subsequent to the potential ability to view organisational tensions surrounding human capital treatment and deployment, such an environment also presented an enticing setting from which to explore my study's objective of investigating the variance of perception and action across different levels of analysis. This afforded an opportunity to understand stakeholder perceptions and subsequent actions towards *being strategic*; contrasted against those of the HRF's view and contribution towards *being strategic*.

3.3.1.2 A research setting aligning to previous research settings

Prior qualitative research has investigated the HRF within a bank being *more strategic* (Truss et al., 2002) as well as the HRF within a bank *becoming strategic* (Pritchard, 2010). Subsequently, undertaking research within a bank could further enrich practice insights within this sector. It is commonly

recognised that organisations face competitive and institutional forces that lead to different creative adaptations of HR practices (Farndale & Paauwe, 2007; Renkema et al., 2016). The Macro contextual situations (cf. Jarzabkowski, 2004) shared by the banking industry additionally promised further industry specific insights within the banking sector. While this was not a significant driver in choosing my research setting, continuing this vein of scholarship to better understand what being strategic entails for the HRF within a bank may be of merit given the importance of context that I argued in Chapter 2.

Joshi and Roh (2009), for example, found in their meta-analysis that the industries in which teams are nested have moderated team diversity and performance outcomes. Accordingly, I tentatively put forward that there may be some additional value of pursuing enquiry within the same industry given the degrees of macro contextual overlap between prior HRM research based within a bank, and the institutional norms of banking (Deephouse, 1996; Meyer & Scott, 1991). As earlier noted, the financial services sector was not a core driver for my investigation. However, when presented amongst other organisational access options, it was determined that this entity presented significant contextual merits that aligned with my sought research outcomes.

3.3.2 Accessing the case organisation

3.3.2.1 Sought case organisation characteristics

Before I sought research access within Sri Lanka, I established a set of preliminary criteria for my research setting that stemmed from both theoretical and practical considerations. First, I sought organisations that were large

enough to house a dedicated HR team, while also having a dedicated HR manager or HR director. Whilst the literature has expressed considerable interest in understanding if HR practices and policies of larger organisations apply in smaller settings (Baron, 2003; Barrett & Mayson, 2006; Huselid, 2003; Katz, Aldrich, Welbourne, & Williams, 2000; Mayson & Barrett, 2006), a larger organisation offered the potential to establish greater variations of praxis and practices not only throughout the organisation, but within the HRF itself.

Larger organisations typically have bigger HRFs, which in turn afford a greater potential for variation. Larger organisations have commonly been a focus of SHRM scholarship (Mayson & Barrett, 2006), in which HR practices have been linked to performance, business objectives and competitive advantage (Ferris et al., 2004; Wright, Dunford, et al., 2001; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005). Accordingly, a larger organisation was more fitting with my research objectives, offering a more conducive environment to achieving them.

Second, I sought case settings where human capital has been discussed or understood to contribute significant value to an organisation. This included either seeking a case location within a knowledge intensive organisation in which human capital is valued more than financial capital (Alvesson, 1993), or within a professional services sector where human capital plays a significant role (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004) within the organisational dynamics. With this initial criterion established, I employed the guidance and help of a colleague to facilitate case selection and access.

3.3.2.2 Identifying possible case organisations

My colleague from whom I sought assistance is a well networked CEO within Sri Lanka who held significant personal and professional social capital needed to engage organisations at the executive management level. In this respect he provided a wealth of market knowledge and contacts. Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2004) note that using your networks and contacts to access extended networks in preparation for site access is a successful and worthwhile strategy to pursue – something I too can concur. If I had not leveraged this help, but instead solicited access myself, it is highly probable that my prospective case setting options would have been significantly less. Ultimately my choice to access perspective case locations through a known and respected third party all but eliminated the persistence, flexibility and luck that is often required to gain organisational access (Feldman et al., 2004).

I articulated to my networked colleague my preference for an organisation where senior managers were known to be open and accommodating. This was done looking ahead to the practicalities of accessing information once access to the organisation had been gained. After a verbal discussion of my criteria with my CEO colleague I was provided with a list of twelve publicly listed or large family owned companies in Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka.

3.3.2.3 Selecting possible case organisations

Emails were then sent from my colleague to the CEOs of each of the twelve companies on my behalf. The email included core details of my study and a request for access across the entire organisation with a more detailed research

statement attached. Of the twelve companies emailed, eight responded offering access. A response was then sent thanking each CEO for their offer, while advising them that I would select the most fitting organisation given my research scope. I then reviewed each organisation with my CEO colleague to best understand the situation on the ground, and to anticipate practical obstacles that could be encountered during data collection – essentially exploring elements such as organisational culture and cooperation. I also accessed company webpages and annual reports (where the information was publicly available) to further understand each organisation. I then relayed core elements to my doctoral supervisors in which methodological and practical implications were discussed. The bank in this study was then selected as a tentative first choice option.

However, given the varied choice of possible case options available, my PhD supervisory panel and I determined it was prudent to contact the HR Director of the bank via telephone. This was to ensure that he was supportive of me being granted access, rather than him following instructions, but in reality, resistant to the idea. This step was useful for me to gauge the tone of the conversation and ascertain through verbal cues if formal access would also mean a likelihood of acquiring useful data - as “what good does it do if one is inside yet has no access to information” (Feldman et al., 2004, p.34).

Following this discussion, I determined that the bank met my criteria for professional services, human capital, size, and practical access. The HR Director was highly supportive of the idea of my study, and very interested in what my findings would uncover. In return for this access a summary report

would be provided on completion of the data collection which offered practical implications for change. This was explicitly stated as being of significant value to him and his team, as well as the broader bank.

3.3.2.4 'Close-with' relationships

The willingness of both the CEO and the Director of HR to help facilitate access was the last significant access hurdle to overcome. With these last steps taken, I not only became confident that I had built the beginnings of a personal rapport, but felt that the strong relationship between my colleague and these two critical stakeholders had begun to be transferred to me by association.

Competition in the banking sector is high, and having worked in the market myself I was aware of how social capital from a personal reference increases trust and openness – something also experienced and asserted by Feldman et al. (2004).

Fully leveraging close-with or close-to relationships that facilitate deep and significant access to areas behind the scenes is only granted to those with strong existing relationships (Johnson et al., 2010). As I was still an outsider, I hoped that the beginnings of establishing rapport through associated network ties would facilitate better access and openness given my mutual connection.

3.3.3 Accessing case participants

Access within the bank itself presented challenges and successes. The networking that had afforded me access resulted in interviews being arranged across the entire organisation. The only exceptions were those who were out of the country during my data collection period. This included the CEO, who was unavailable for large portions of my data collection. The HR Director and

their Personal Assistant provided significant guidance on whom it might be best to talk to, given the direction of my study. This resulted in conversations with 55 participants with whom 65 separate interviews were conducted.

3.3.3.1 Enablers of access

On the first day of interviews I learnt that a consultancy firm at which I had been a senior manager and senior consultant had undertaken the strategic plan for the bank at a critical juncture in the bank's recent history. This potentially brought me closer to the participants through trust and legitimacy (Feldman et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2010). I found on multiple occasions that this resulted in participants who had been involved with strategic planning 'opening up' to me because word had spread internally that I had worked for the firm that had developed the strategic plan. Participants on these occasions stated that since there was a connection, they felt comfortable discussing strategically sensitive elements in detail. Statements like "[your consulting firm] was a key part of where we are today" and "they really got us all involved" and "[s]ince you were with [the consulting firm] I can let you in on what's happening now and where we are at" reflect the positive elements by this association.

Additionally, on the second week of data collection I had an article published in a widely distributed business newspaper within Sri Lanka. I received many remarks regarding the article, and it appeared my legitimacy grew amongst senior managers and HR practitioners alike. My perception was that I began to be seen not only as an independent researcher, but in some cases as a person who could make recommendations of change to top management or affect

change within the HRF itself. This additional legitimacy resulted in closer relationships (Johnson et al., 2010), and a more open environment.

3.3.3.2 Challenges of access

Despite the face validity created by events outlined in 3.3.3.1, two challenges emerged in accessing data. The first pertained to access to documentation while the second related to me being able to naturally undertake passive observation of HR practitioner activities.

Documentation

In the case of documentation, in contrast to conversations and interviews where I found participants to be largely open and unguarded on most issues, I encountered a pervasive reluctance for me to view documentation. The strong regulatory nature of the banking industry, in addition to its highly competitive nature resulted in a mostly ‘subtle’ resistance to document requests. I would ask if I could view a document for means of triangulation (with confidentiality overtly stated), and would receive remarks like “we will get that to you” – however, the documents would not materialise. I was granted significant access to financial information that all required public disclosure, yet less than ideal access was granted to documents more fitting to my study, such as process and planning documentation, outside of interview settings.

In many cases documents would be shown to me in an interview, but I did not have prolonged access to such documents for detailed analysis and triangulation. I eventually settled on requesting to see documents in this manner and did my best to visually scan and verify them as best I could - given the time constraints. Additionally, I was also unable to make copies of

the amended strategic plan that held detailed performance targets and the bank's strategies. I was promised a copy of the strategic plan once the plan expired in July 2016, yet ultimately did not receive a copy despite multiple requests.

In the latter part of my site visit, with stronger personal relationships established, I eventually obtained access to HR process documentation - but this too was not exhaustive. I was also requested not to make copies of the documentation, so I instead wrote general notes for later reference. Not having copies of process documentation during my analysis has ultimately not hindered my analysis. However, it has weakened my ability to extensively triangulate information across all areas of enquiry.

Observation

The second problem I encountered related to participant observation within the HRF. Initially, when I had scheduled observation time with various teams within the HR department, the resulting observation would be more akin to a student being taught how something worked as opposed to me being a passive observer. Initially, this was very informative, and helped me understand the process/es of interest. However, once I had learnt about these processes I found it difficult to observe how an activity or process actually occurred, or to place myself in a situation to observe the natural dynamics of the HRF.

To address this, I postponed my requests for observation in the earlier stages of my visit and focused on interviews. In between interview times I situated myself in the main HRF office and sought informal social engagement. On two separate occasions, I purchased food for 50 plus HR personnel and

associated staff. These two actions resulted in my presence becoming much more familiar to staff.

Additionally, I attended a retirement party for two HR staff which had the unintended - yet positive - effect of bringing me closer to participants, as this was viewed as me engaging in a cultural exercise important to the organisation. Feldman et al. (2004) refer to these as *commitment acts*. These are acts that are not intended to yield any benefits, but increase rapport. As a result, it became natural for me to be seen around the HRF and more naturally observe the varied interaction dynamics. Subsequently, requests to observe activities as time progressed also resulted in my observations becoming more fruitful than my initial attempts.

3.4 Single case framework

3.4.1 Attending to multiple levels of analysis

An embedded single case study in one organisation was used for this study - although numerous levels of analysis were employed (Yin, 1994) in the use of this single case. The use of a case study approach is a favoured method when posing *how* and *why* questions, and when the researcher lacks control over events that hold context within 'real-life' (Yin, 1994, 2014). Johnson et al. (2007) note that an investigation of activity utilising multiple levels of analysis (attending to multiple actor categories) should be accompanied with varied theoretical and methodological approaches. My embedded single case has used multiple actor categories including employees, line managers, middle managers, and senior managers. This entailed four levels of analysis

throughout the non-HR and HRF stratum. These are illustrated in Table 3.1 shown below.

Table 3.1: Overview of participant levels of analysis

| Level of Analysis | Non-HR Stratum | HRF Stratum |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | (A) Senior Managers – Unit Heads | (E) Senior Manager HR |
| 2 | (B) Middle Managers | (F) HR Practitioners |
| 3 | (C) Line Managers | |
| 4 | (D) Employees | |

3.4.2 Coding different levels of participants

Each of these strata were coded and analysed separately before establishing relationships between them. The utilisation of an embedded single case design was selected primarily as a means to address multiple levels of analysis as well as multiple organisational units of analysis while keeping the contextual issues as constant as possible. Wright and Nishii (2007) illustrated how nearly all SHRM research centres on variance at one level of analysis. Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) have put forward that to undertake a full investigation of HR implementation, one needs to review the four stages of implementation from the decision to the quality review of the employee.

3.4.3 Attending to my research objectives through a single case study method

My research is strengthened through the utilisation of an embedded case study approach. It offers a means to address the concerns of Wright and Nishii (2007) and Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) regarding SHRM research not

utilising multiple levels of analysis, which was discussed in chapter 2. My work also avoids using the exclusive views of HR managers and employees through the inclusion of senior managers and multiple business units - including strategy setters. This assists with removing bias, as HR managers and employee groups may not have exposure to firm level strategic decision rationale (Truss et al., 2002).

My use of the case study method specifically addresses the significant gaps in the literature regarding the absence of theory relating to what being strategic means for the HR function. The embedded single case approach allows me to extend theory by addressing these gaps while also capturing circumstances and conditions of everyday banking interactions; representing what Yin (2013) terms the *common case* approach, which is a suitable rationale for the selection of a single case method.

The strength of using an alternative to a single case – a multiple case study - has been well argued (e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989a; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), with the value of this approach being the ability to either contrast cases or identify similarities (Yin, 2014) in order to extend theoretical frameworks (cf. Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Regnér, 2003). My selection of a single case, however, entails using a cross-case analysis in which sub-units within the case are compared across others in the single organisation; this therefore affords “the ability to engage in rich analysis” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p 550), which facilitates a deeper exploration of an element that has been understudied. Accordingly, using two separate organisations would not serve the purpose of my research in which I have sought a fine-grained analysis (Collis, 1991) to

understand what roles different business units seek given their own contextual situations, and how such roles are delivered by the HRF. As a single embedded case investigating multiple levels of analysis, I have provided an overview of likely strategic phenomena that occurs at each level of analysis. Illustrated in Table 3.2 is a selection of applicable organisational phenomena, the level of analysis that occurs, and the likely actors involved in activities surrounding the phenomena. This has been adapted from the literature of Nishii and Wright (2008) who developed a process model for SHRM as well as role expectancy theory and role-set literature (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Katz & Kahn, 1978)

Table 3.2: Stakeholder group representation of roles

| Phenomena | Level | Actors |
|--|---|---|
| Decision to implement HR practices - formulation (planned) | Senior Management/HR Head | Board of Directors Chief Executive Officer Chief Financial Officer Unit Heads HR Director |
| Actual implement of HR practice - Emergent | HR Function/Organisational Middle & Line Managers | HR Director HR Team Leaders HR Team members Unit Heads |
| Role signallers | Non-HR Senior, Middle & Line Managers | Board of Directors Chief Executive Officer Chief Financial Officer Unit Heads |
| Role receivers | HR Function | HR Director HR Team Leaders HR Team members |
| Actual role undertaken | HR Function | HR Director HR Team Leaders HR Team members |
| Factors that lead to variation of roles and tensions | HR Function/Organisational actor dynamics and situated activities | Organisation wide |

As previously outlined, a SAP lens leans heavily towards the emergent school of strategy formulation (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and situated strategy (Mantere, 2005, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). From this perspective, senior managers are not always the strategy setters. Strategies emerge from the centre as well as from the periphery (Regnér, 2003). Social context theory put forward by Ferris and his colleagues (1998) argues that an aggregation of perceptions within social structures is not possible within an organisation (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). While planning itself may be undertaken at higher levels alone, the enactment of activities that vary beyond prescribed practices may occur, with such antecedents of this variation happening at other levels of the organisation within daily situated activities. Accordingly, I gave attention to the actions at multiple levels of activity.

3.4.4 Structuring the strata within a single case

Structuring my data required breaking the interviews down into strata from within the organisation as conceived in my research planning - using multiple levels of analysis. The strata overview is shown in Figure 3.2. This figure provides an overview for each of the six stratum of participants I investigated within my research. The figure illustrates the participant group (stratum), the size of the stratum, the number of participants interviewed within that stratum (and the percentage this constitutes of the total), as well as descriptions of the roles of participants within each stratum. As Figure 3.2 illustrates, I interviewed large percentages of senior managers, HR senior management and HR practitioners, and smaller numbers of the bank's total middle and line managers. HR practitioners were those that had leadership roles within the

HRF. Within the bank, any participant outside this level within the HRF had limited agency in their activities, and largely carried out processing and clerical work at the direction of their team leader. At the employee level of analysis, the number of employees that I interviewed made up just a fraction of the bank's total employees given the total size of the bank.

Figure 3.2: Strata of interview participants

| Strata overview of interview participants (Greater than 3,000) | |
|---|--|
| <i>Non-Human Resource Function Actors</i> | <i>Human Resource Function Actors</i> |
| <u>Senior Corporate Management</u> Size of stratum = 13 Interview participants = 12 Percentage of stratum = 92% Description of participants: Senior leadership: Business unit heads and subunit heads. | <u>Senior Corporate Management</u> Size of stratum = 1 Interviews participants = 1 Percentage of stratum = 100% - Census Description of participant: Head of the HR Function |
| <u>Middle Managers</u> Size of stratum = 80 Interviews participants = 17 Percentage of stratum = 21% Description of participants: Team leaders within business units | <u>HR Practitioners – Leadership Positions</u> Size of stratum = 9 Interviews participants = 9 Percentage of stratum = 100% - Census Description of participants: Team leaders within the HR function that lead |
| <u>Branch Line Managers</u> Size of stratum = 159 Interviews = 8 Percentage of stratum = 5% Description of participants: Those with the designation of branch Manager and run a branch | |
| <u>Employees</u> Size of stratum = 2,813 Interviews = 8 Percentage of stratum = 0.28% Description of participants: Employees below the line management level of reporting. | <u>Not Applicable</u> |

3.4.5 Participant and organisational demographics

All my research participants were Sri Lankan nationals. Interviews were conducted in English, with all participants fluent in the English language (also

see section 4.6.2.1 for cultural and language contextual factors). All organisational documentation (regulatory and internal) used English, while all formal communications within the bank (written and verbal) used English, as did all the bank's enterprise systems and technologies. The average service period of employees across the entire organisation was 13 years. 43% of the bank's employees were female. Table 3.3 reports the gender composition of participants who were interviewed.

Table 3.3: Gender composition of participants

| Non-HRF Participants | | HRF Participants | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---|----------|
| <i>Senior Corporate Management</i> | | <i>Senior Corporate Management</i> | |
| Female | 1 | Female | 0 |
| Male | 11 | Male | 1 |
| Total | 12 | Total | 1 |
| <i>Middle Managers</i> | | <i>HR Practitioners in Leadership Positions</i> | |
| Female | 3 | Female | 5 |
| Male | 14 | Male | 4 |
| Total | 17 | Total | 9 |
| <i>Branch Line Managers</i> | | | |
| Female | 8 | | |
| Male | 0 | | |
| Total | 8 | | |
| <i>Employees</i> | | | |
| Female | 6 | | |
| Male | 2 | | |
| Total | 8 | | |

3.4.6 Single case research outcome

Empirical generalisability is not an outcome sought from this research, nor is it implied. Rather, the rich data provided by this approach offers the potential for analytical generalisation (Yin, 1994) and a framework that could be used

and developed by other researchers. Accordingly, my research is presented as offering generalised applicability (Ambrosini et al., 2007).

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Waves of data collection

I collected data from a site visit that lasted six weeks. I undertook a total of 65 interviews from 55 participants over this period in two waves of interviews (illustrated in Table 3.4). I conducted 46 interviews across the organisation in the first wave, while in the second wave I had a more structured and focused intent from theoretical positions that emerged after revisiting the literature. Consequently, wave two of data collection entailed 19 interviews where I either revisited participants for clarification (n=10) or undertook new interviews within a theoretical sampling process (n=9).

Table 3.4: Waves of interview

| | No. of sites | No. of respondents | Number of Interviews |
|--|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Wave 1 (Organisation wide) | 6 | 46 | 46 |
| Wave 2 (Targeted theoretical sampling) | | | |
| New participants | - | 9 | 9 |
| Re-interview of wave 1 participants | - | - | 10 |
| Total | 6 | 55 | 65 |

3.5.1.1 Wave one interviews

Except for those interviewed in the bank's branch network, participants in wave one were largely centralised in the bank's head office. Wave one of the interviews had two purposes. First, as I had no prior knowledge of the organisation it enabled me to understand the function of each unit and obtain perceptions about "how things work in their organisation" (Ambrosini et al., 2007, p 68). Here I paid attention to the role of human capital, and how the HR function interacted with personnel from BUs. Second, I sought to understand the strategic nature of each unit's relationships with HR practitioners.

My approach to data collection was therefore largely unstructured interviews, with the principle objective to let the participants narrate their positions and enable them to bring to light areas that they deemed important. This unstructured approach, in combination with observation, enables researchers to examine characteristics and behaviours while avoiding any restrictive categorisations (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The stratification of participants also ensured a degree of representation of the organisation with the intention of "maximising the likelihood of accessing variation more than a homogeneous sample would" (Bosley, Arnold, & Cohen, 2009, p.13).

I sought to understand the narratives of the participants by letting them express their perspectives with me seeking to draw out additional information to understand the dynamics of their narrative. Of the 46 interviews conducted in wave one, the average time duration for each interview was just over 1 hour. Wave one resulted in a total of just over 47 hours of interview time.

3.5.1.2 Wave two interviews

After completing wave one I utilised theoretical sampling as a means to draw out additional elements within interviews in a far more structured manner after having referred to the literature while also identifying gaps in my data – an approach supported by Glaser and Strauss (1968). From wave one I had gained a representative understanding from across the organisation. Inquiries, to this point, had provided an exploratory understanding of the interactions of HR practitioners when acting as strategic partners, and variations of these interactions with different BUs.

In wave two I began to develop theory, which in turn determined what data needed to be collected next, and where this data should be collected. Glaser and Strauss note that “[t]he processes of data collection is controlled by emerging theory, whether substantive or informal” (p 45). Bryman and Bell (2015) point out that the critical characteristic of adopting this form of purposeful sampling is that it is ongoing, rather than being a distinct single stage. This occurs until theoretical saturation has occurred. In wave two I interviewed across the organisation, re-interviewing some participants to draw out information relating to my emerging informal themes.

Additionally, I also commenced informal interviews in social settings outside of work such as at café and bars, while also spending more time observing through corridor encounters, which added to my data as well. These interactions have not been recorded as interviews, yet constituted many additional hours of interaction from which note taking occurred after each of these interactions concluded. During wave two, I accordingly re-interviewed

ten participants from wave one while also interviewing nine new participants. This meant that 19 interviews occurred in wave 2. The average interview time for wave two was just under 34 minutes, constituting just over 10 hours of interview time (See Appendix A for participant interview information).

3.5.2 Locations of data collection

My data collection included conducting interviews at four levels of analysis. I undertook interviews across eight different BUs of the bank - interviewing senior, middle and line managers from within these BUs, as well as employees. In addition to this I interviewed the HR Director and HR practitioners from within the HRF. As stated by Casey (1995), I sought a wide overview of the varied positions and departments that included occupational groupings as well as strategic importance.

The formal interviews occurred during working hours. In the case of the non-HR units, I undertook the interviews with the BU heads in their office. For example, if I was meeting the head of treasury, I conducted the meeting in their office. When a senior or middle manager had a closed office, I would also conduct interviews with them in their office. When interviewing personnel who did not have closed offices outside of the HR function, I would interview them in their department's conference room. This was easy to manage as every business unit had its own conference area.

When interviewing branch line managers, I visited six of the eight branches in person, traveling to these. For branches outside of Colombo I conducted telephone interviews with branch managers. This was largely due to the

tremendous traffic issues within Sri Lanka and the very long periods of travel required to access branches outside of the commercial capital.

Similarly, for branch area managers that managed regions, I also conducted telephone interviews as well. Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) revealed no significant differences emerging between interviewing in a face-to-face format and interviewing via the telephone. In the case of HR personnel, apart from the HR Director, all interviews occurred within the HR conference room as all HR departments were designed in an open floor plan format.

3.5.3 Interview protocol

3.5.3.1 Interview approach

My interview structure entailed steering participants towards my research questions while attempting to be open to the emergent ideas of participants (Ambrosini et al., 2007; Gioia et al., 1994; Orlikowski, 2002) as they narrated their own realities. This meant that I was principally 'data driven' (Ambrosini et al., 2007; Gill & Johnson, 2010) and approached interviews in an unstructured manner without an interview schedule. Semi-structured interviews in practice occur across a continuum of structure - from a loose to narrow focus, from nudging participants in a desired direction to having several specific and categorised questions covered.

My place on the continuum entailed a clear idea of the broad research questions I wished to ask and a loose semi-structured interview where I sought to satisfy an understanding from my own position. This often entailed letting a participant complete their own narrative even if they appeared to me stray into an area that may not have seemed at the time to be relevant to my questions. I

would steer them back if their narratives were clearly not progressing in the right direction – yet often they righted themselves while having also provided rich data that I would not have conceived of myself as a topic for my interview structure. While valuable insights were gained through this approach, it did make my analysis process significantly more time consuming.

Interview objectives

For participants, interview objects were established for each level of analysis. Across all levels of analysis, when I first met with a participant my starting objective was to broadly understand what the role of the participant was within the organisation. All interviews therefore started with the first question being “could you take a minute to tell me what your responsibilities are?” Within this discussion, I would ask for clarification as needed. In interviews outside the HRF, I would then transition to seeking to understand the interactions participants had with the HRF, seeking their perceptions around these. Based on their responses, I would then be guided by the data to draw additional information along the natural topics of discussion. Key areas of inquiry amongst participants were “what, when, how and where” do activities between themselves and their BU occur with the HRF. Similarly, for HRF participants, I had an objective to understand “what, when, where and how” interactions occurred with those both inside and outside the HRF.

I used my understanding of how coding would occur to draw out data from all participants. Hatch (2002) and Saldaña (2015) argue that when coding, one should not think of patterns only as ‘stable regularities’ but as varied.

Accordingly, as data emerged within interviews I tried to be conscious of

drawing out elements that would inform my coding. These included attempting to better understand the characteristics of patterns discussed by Saldaña (2015), which are listed below.

- *similarity (things happen the same way)*
- *difference (they happen in predictably different ways)*
- *frequency (they happen often or seldom)*
- *sequence (they happen in a certain order)*
- *correspondence (they happen in relation to other activities or events)*
- *causation (one appears to cause another)*

3.5.3.2 Interview procedure

Before the face-to-face interviews commenced, I presented participants with an information sheet (Appendix B). I explained the summary of my research and asked them if they could read the information sheet and sign the consent form (Appendix C) which made clear my student status and university affiliations as well as the purpose of my research. During my verbal summaries of the information sheet I stressed that all elements of their discussion would remain anonymous. I outlined that a stakeholder report would be submitted to the institution that would be based on a summary of all discussions, but that nothing would be presented that could compromise their anonymity. As earlier noted, my impression was that this resulted in participants ‘opening up’ as they felt their views would be heard by decision makers within the bank. I requested that the interview be recorded, and all but two participants agreed to this. I took notes during all recorded interviews, and made extra efforts to do so during the non-recorded interviews.

Where the interviews were recorded, I offered a copy of the recording to the participant after the completion of the interview. Three participants accepted

this offer. In the case where the recordings did not occur, after completing the interview I took fifteen minutes to make notes on my recollection of the interview as well as ideas that I believed were being transmitted. When conducting interviews with participants over the phone, a copy of the information sheet was sent in advance, and the participant was asked if they could review the document. Copies of the consent forms were sent back to me via email. Before commencing the interview, I would however repeat the core elements of the purpose of the study, this time verbally asking to record the conversation and gaining additional verbal consent. I also made one last effort before the commencement of the interview to further stress the protection of their anonymity.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Transcription

The interviews resulted just over 57 hours of recorded interviews. All interviews that were recorded were transcribed verbatim. Upon my initial review of the transcripts I simultaneously went through my meeting notes that I had made after each interview. This was done so that my observations and impressions at the time of the interview could be compared against the transcripts.

3.6.2 Integrating my observation notes into data analysis

I had started my coding during the collection of data by ‘jotting down’ phrases and words that stood out. Saldaña (2015) suggests this to ensure any thoughts, no matter “how fleeting” are recorded. These stood out on the notes in an analytic memo format through block letters being used to indicate preliminary

codes (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Saldaña, 2015). This greatly assisted in helping clarify issues like context, broader perspectives, activities and actions (Ambrosini et al., 2007). Note taking was also a very useful exercise which helped me to connect ideas appearing within interviews that were separated by a few days but were fresh in my mind at the time.

By reviewing my notes and observations against the completed transcripts, reviewing the preliminary codes - as well as drawing on documents such as processes and procedures, a greater level of “trustworthiness” (i.e. the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability) was achieved than if I had simply relied on interview transcripts alone (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6.3 Coding overview

Coding was undertaken using Nvivo 11 software through thematic coding. This coding entailed reviewing my data in order to seek the identification of emergent classifications (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The coding was undertaken in four phases; first developing codes, then determining categories from the codes before establishing themes. From the themes, my theory framework was developed. The four phases of my coding process were consistent with the coding model put forward by Saldaña (2015).

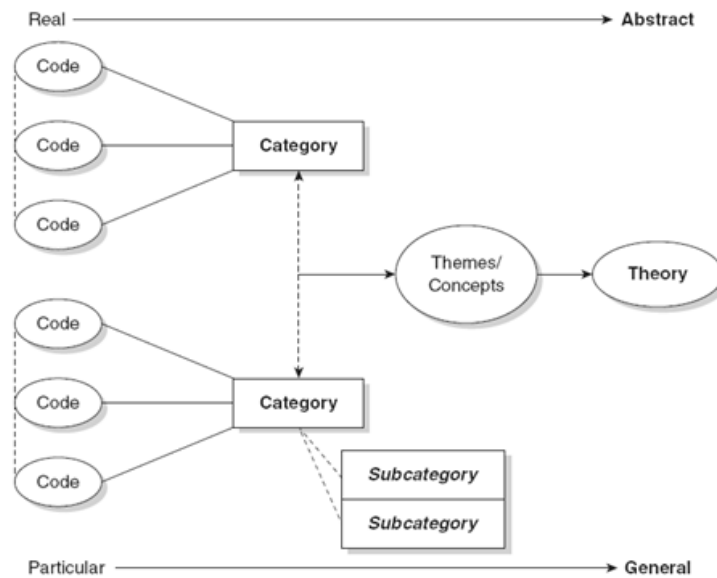
I undertook two iterations of phase one, first going through the transcripts and the analytical memos to review preliminary coding, then going through them again and coding them to Nvivo. Figure 3.3 below provides an overview of Saldaña’s (2015) coding process which I used in the analysis of data. The model entails a progressive coding process where one moves across a

continuum from 'real and particular' to 'abstract and general'. The coding process first entails thematically coding participant narratives. This is conducted at the sentence level of meaning. Then it entails the identification of categories that represent a grouping of codes, which can in turn be aligned to themes or concepts. It is from this that theory can finally be developed.

3.6.4 Phase 1: Coding

The coding of my data was heuristic, in that it was exploratory without a specific formula requiring the linking of ideas (Saldaña, 2015). Here I attempted to ensure I followed the words of Richards and Morse (2012) where they explain the nature of coding and the notion of linking: "It leads you from the data to the ideas, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (p. 137). Here my coding analysis resulted in me looking for patterns once reaching the end of wave two of the interviews. Following Ambrosini et al. (2007), my coding scheme initially stemmed from my perceptions in the field and evolved throughout my data analysis. These initial codes helped structure my thoughts and directions as more data was obtained.

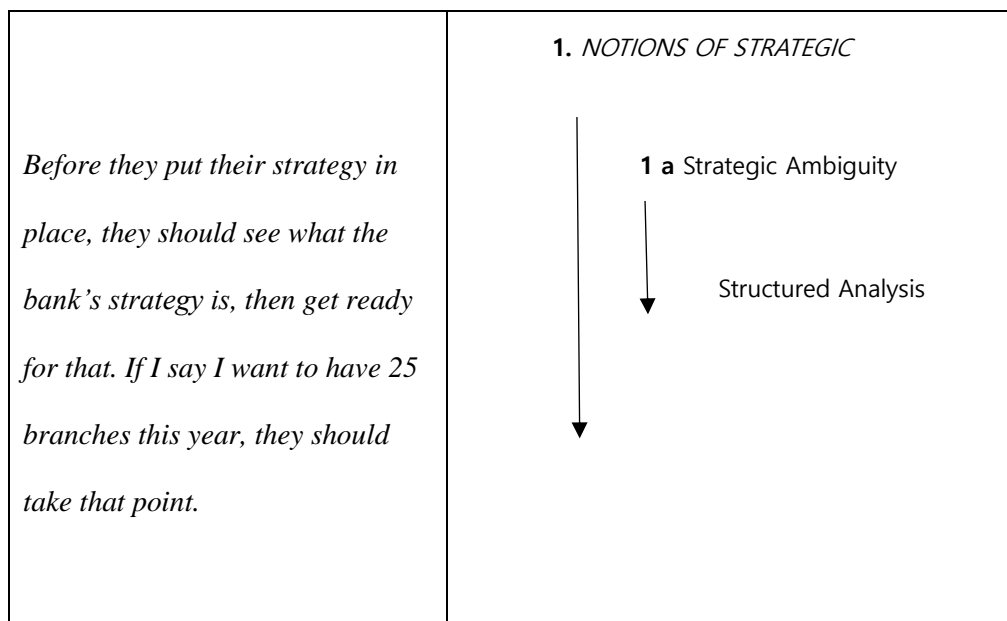
Figure 3.3: Saldaña's streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative enquiry



Taken from Saldaña (2015)

During the coding process I also utilised simultaneous coding, which applies multiple codes to a single datum (Saldana, 2009). With qualitative enquiry, it is acknowledged that data cannot always be specifically bounded; meaning best case categories occur within “fuzzy” boundaries (Tesch, 1990). Coding allows datum to be coded in a manner where it may apply to multiple levels of analysis simultaneously. For example, illustrated in figure 3.4, I show how multiple codes are applied to the narrative of the unit head of branch operations. The dictum produced three codes that entailed *notions of strategic integration, strategic ambiguity stemming from this, and the concept of structure analysis* representing strategic activity.

Figure 3.4: Example of simultaneous coding



3.6.4.1 Coding each stratum

The coding of the six strata (four non-HR Strata and two HR Strata) was done in steps where I systematically coded each interview within their assigned strata before moving onto the subsequent strata. Each of the four Non-HR strata and the two HR strata were coded thematically, independently of other strata. This allowed for a means for each code across the level of analysis to be developed from the ground up. In Nvivo, I would start the first interview with no nodes, and add interview narratives by either creating a new node in that strata folder, or by adding to an existing node that had already been created from a reference in the assigned strata prior to that. Coding was undertaken with the aim of contributing to my research questions, with nodes of codes frequently being shifted between categories 'clearly relevant' to my research questions, 'likely relevant' and 'could be relevant'. As my understanding increased and themes merged, nodes and their relationships were rearranged into a higher order category of which research question they related to.

I started coding with the non-HR senior managers to first develop an understanding of the planning and outside perspectives of the HR function. While my codes were thematically and independently developed within each stratum, I was aware that the sequencing would still influence how I framed codes in later strata. Having spent so much time and thought within a stratum when coding, I was aware that it would be all but impossible to start anew when coding additional strata. For this reason, I determined that starting with non-HR senior Managers (NHR-SM) would offer broader scope from which any biases would more likely be beneficial to my coding, rather than inhibit it. The broader activities occurring at this level of analysis would likely ‘open up’ perspectives – consciously or subconsciously – rather than narrow my thoughts in subsequent analysis towards an HRF perspective. Abbreviations have been developed for participant narratives within each stratum. These are illustrated in Table 3.5 below with the abbreviations used within the findings and discussions sections that follow this chapter.

Table 3.5: Abbreviations of stratum for participant narrative identification

| Non-HR Stratum | | HR Stratum | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Participant Stratum</i> | <i>Stratum Code</i> | <i>Participant Stratum</i> | <i>Stratum Code</i> |
| Senior Managers | NHR-SM | HR Director | HR-SM |
| Middle Managers | NHR-MM | HR Practitioners | HR-PR |
| Line Managers | NHR-LM | | |
| Employees | EMP | <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>Not applicable</i> |

After coding non-HR senior managers (NHR-SM), I then coded the HR Director (HR-SM), followed by HR practitioners (HR-PR), before then moving back to non-HR middle managers (NHR-MM), line managers (NHR-LN) and employees (EMP) - in that order. This enabled me to contrast HR-SM against NHR-SM. The choice of coding HR-MM then allowed for the planning of elements of both strata of senior management participants to be understood before coding HR-MM, where implementation would likely be more prevalent. Again, these were coded thematically and independently of each other.

3.6.5 Phase 2: Categorizing

While the terminology of ‘code’ and ‘category’ have been known to be interchangeable, they also represent two distinct stages in which the former is a means to capture crucial components of each story, while the latter clusters these together into patterns that facilitate linkage and connection (Saldaña, 2015). Charmaz (2006) refers to the code being the bones and the category the skeleton. I developed my initial categories and then developed the sub-categories under these.

In the same manner that Ambrosini et al. (2007) constructed their categories, I initially looked at the *activity unit* (Category A) which looked at where the individual activity took place, the *activity focus* (Category B) which looked at what activity was being performed, and the repertoire of activities (Category C) that classified activities that were carried out on a regular basis, known as a capability (Collis, 1991) and practices (Orlikowski, 2002). Within each of these categories were sub-categories.

3.6.6 Phase 3: Theory

Once my categories and subcategories were sufficiently refined I embarked on theory creation. While the actual act of creating theory can be a messy one, I sought to go beyond the *reality* of the data I had collected and move towards the conceptual and theoretical (Saldaña, 2015). My initial coding and its iterative structure followed Layder's (1998) contention that existing theories should inform and drive the initial coding development. The themes and insights discovered and the manner they interrelate moved me towards the development of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). As discussed in my section 3.4.5, the theories created are not intended to be generalisable in the positivist sense of the word. Rather they offer generalisable applicability (Ambrosini et al., 2007), in that what was observed across the bank may be applicable in other organisations, attempting the movement from "the particular to the general by inferring *transfer*" (Saldaña, 2015, p.13).

3.6.7 Triangulation

To increase the *construct validity* of my research I used data triangulation from multiple sources. While access to documented data initially posed some difficulty as discussed in section 3.3, the overall triangulation process enhanced the development of my findings. My final sources of documentary data consisted of over 2,000 pages of documentation. I used five sources of evidence that can be used in case study research (Yin, 2014) as a means of triangulation. Table 3.6 outlines the sources of evidence used within this case study.

Table 3.6: This research's sources of evidence

| Source of Evidence | Sources Employed | Examples |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Documentation | ✓ | Annual reports, internal reports, viewing of strategic documentation |
| Archival Records | ✓ | Previous strategic plan, earlier strategic metrics |
| Interviews | ✓ | Senior, middle and line managers as well as employees and HR practitioners |
| Participant observation | ✓ | Senior management meetings, daily HR practices, HR practitioner socialization |
| Physical artefacts | ✓ | HRM information systems, internal servers |

3.7 Ethical considerations

A low risk notification was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, with confirmation of receipt occurring in November of 2015 (Appendix D). Low risk notification was deemed to be suitable for this research project as all participants of my research were adults in a professional work setting who could suitably provide written informed consent. There were no perceived risks to participants given their demographics and the nature of my research questions. My supervisors were also involved in the peer review process that is required in ethical low risk notification – with us jointly concurring that matters we discussed made the research project suitably low risk to myself and my participants.

CHAPTER 4 - INTRODUCING THE BANK'S ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Everything is determined by context.

Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart - The Collapse of Chaos

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of contextually relevant phenomena that link my case organisation's extra-organisational environment to its intra-firm context. In doing so, my analysis within this chapter supports the broader contextual dynamics surrounding the research findings presented in chapters 5 and 6. Specifically, this chapter offers foundational analysis of factors that have an influence on how, why and where HR practitioners engage in strategic work. The contextual overview in this chapter is based on interview responses, organisational documentation, and documented observations from my time in the field.

The relevance of this chapter to my research is that practices within an organisation occur across varying contextual situations, with practices often evolving to incorporate situational context. This can result in generalised characteristics as well as localised idiosyncrasies (Jarzabkowski, 2004). The formulation and implementation of strategies can occur, for example, within strategic business units (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984), in addition to at the organisation's centre (Hambrick, 1980; Hofer & Schendel, 1980; Regnér, 2003). This presents opportunities for general and localised phenomena to influence individual and group level outcomes (Renkema et al., 2016). It is therefore prudent to identify contextual dynamics that may influence how,

where and why HR practitioners are able to make strategic contributions. It is these contextual dynamics from my case which I discuss in this chapter.

The literature has addressed both external and internal factors that offer indications of whether the HRF is more likely to be administratively or strategically orientated (Brandl & Pohler, 2010). These include external factors such as unionisation, legislation and labour market dynamics (Jacoby, 1985; Kochan, 1997; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003), as well as internal factors such as constraints upon CEOs to delegate strategic roles (Brandl & Pohler, 2010), centralisation (Truss et al., 2002) and the aptitude of the HRF (Guest & King, 2004). In this chapter I address both the external and the internal environment by illustrating how external factors link to internal ways of thinking and doing.

4.1.1 Chapter structure

I start this chapter by discussing the importance of context (4.2) before presenting a framework to illustrate contextually relevant phenomena (4.2.1). As context incorporates an expansive space of enquiry, in this subsection I illustrate the merit of using Renkema et al.'s (2016) extra-organisational level contextual factors to address a number of antecedents found to affect HRM practices and praxis. I then use Renkema et al.'s (2016) extra-organisational framework as a means to structure the remainder of the chapter. Accordingly, market conditions (4.3), laws and regulations (4.4), institution dynamics (4.5) and cultures (4.6) are all discussed. My analysis demonstrates how these factors impact notions of what being strategic entails, the identities of HRF

and BU actors, and organisational structures that either enable or disable HR practitioners to undertake strategically relevant work.

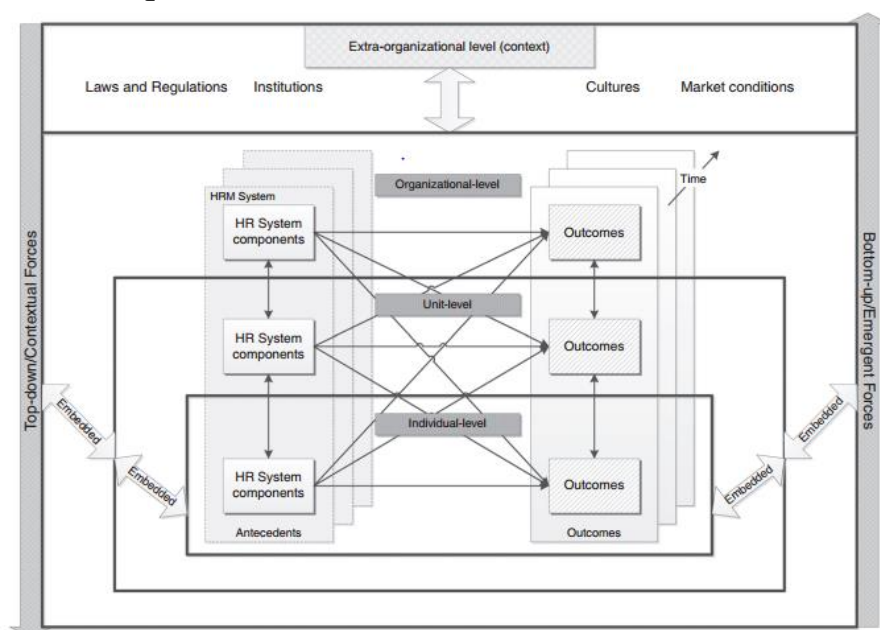
4.2 Why context is important?

Context is important in framing phenomena surrounding strategic activity. Jarzabkowski (2004) “suggest[s] that practice occurs within [a] coexistent and fluid interplay between contexts” (p. 542). Broader contextual elements like extra-organisational contextual issues (Renkema et al., 2016), the internal organisation (Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman, 1978), and the characteristics of corporate control (Bower, 1970; Regnér, 2003; Vancil & Buddrus, 1979) can impact the ‘doing’ of strategy. An understanding of such elements in HRM scholarship is not only under-researched (Renkema et al., 2016), but offers the potential for a better informed account of the forces driving HRF–BU practices and praxis. This chapter therefore allows for the results of my findings chapters (which primarily investigate micro-meso level phenomena) to be informed by macro-meso level occurrences.

The multi-level research approach I used makes this chapter valuable in two respects. First, Renkema et al. (2016) argues both the importance of including context into multi-level analysis, and for the need to especially account for an organisation's external context. They emphasise the importance of this, offering a means to account for both the bottom up and top down forces within HR systems. Second, the BUs within my study (while surrounded by their own contextual situations that make them different from one another) are not autonomous. They fit into higher level frameworks in which contextual phenomena is linked to multi-level outcomes (Renkema et al., 2016).

Renkema et al.'s (2016) framework titled 'Landscape of unanswered multi-level HRM research questions', illustrates the connection between context and multi-level outcomes, (see Figure 4.1) and outlines the interplay of macro context influencing HR systems (meso-level) and individual praxis (micro-level).

Figure 4.1: The landscape of unanswered multi-level HRM research questions



Taken from Renkema et al. (2016)

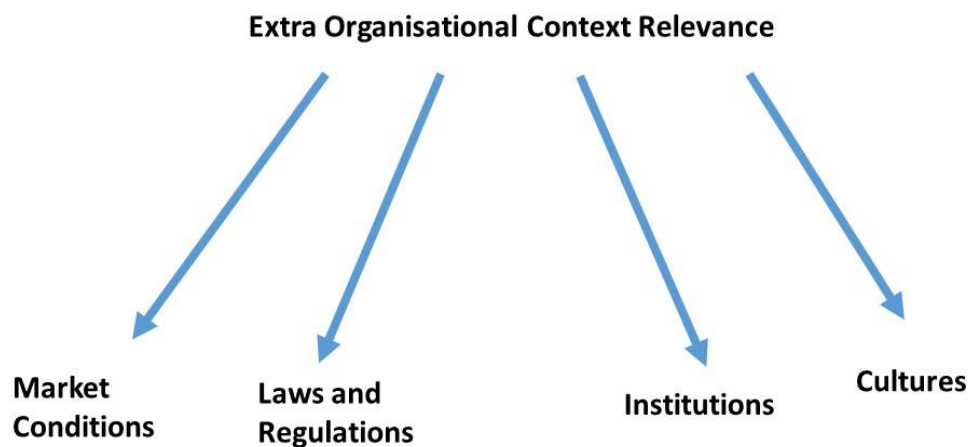
As shown in Chapter 2's Figure 2.3, Jarzabkowski (2004) referenced three levels of context – (1) macro context, (2) within-firm, micro context and (3) actor cognition. While my analysis in the following two 'results' chapter's focuses on the neglected elements of *within-firm, micro context* and *actor cognition* contexts, her work also illustrates that there is an interplay between all levels of context, including the macro context. Accordingly, it is important to address higher-level macro contextual elements' connections to social structures and situated organisational activities.

4.2.1 The need for extra-organisational context

Both Renkema et al. (2016) (addressing HRM multi-level research) and Jarzabkowski (2004) (addressing the integration of strategic contextual levels), note the importance of larger level contextual elements from outside an organisation. They both subscribe to the notion that external context is highly relevant: either to HR system components (Renkema et al., 2016), or in reviewing more granular levels of context of strategic activity within an organisation as a means to account for recursive and adaptive practices (Jarzabkowski, 2004).

Accordingly, I use the four extra-organisational factors outlined in Renkema et al.'s (2016) framework. These four extra-organisational level context elements are illustrated in Figure 4.1, and include: (1) market conditions, (2) laws and regulations, (3) institutions, and (4) culture. During the interactive process of data analysis and the additional literature review, it became apparent that the work of Renkema et al (2016) captured contextual elements that were clearly present within the bank. Accordingly, Renkema et al.'s framework was selected to structure this chapter. Their framework's four extra-organisational contextual factors were found to explain how the Bank's BUs and the HRF made sense of their activities, and subsequently what *being strategic* meant to different actors. It is from this sensemaking that variations of HR practices, interaction, and activity begin to emerge.

Figure 4.2: Extra Organisational Level Context



Adapted from Renkema et al. (2016)

4.3 Market Conditions

This section investigates the market conditions that influenced internal elements of the bank. I start by providing a brief overview of the bank and its history, before illustrating how a culmination of ownership structure and the economic climate resulted in change within the bank. I provide explanations of how market conditions influenced recruitment and retention. For ease of reference, my case study's anonymous bank will be referred to as "Public Sri Lankan Bank" (PSLB). Participant narratives are used in this section, and their strata are identified by a participant code following illustrated narratives. These were presented in the Table 3.4 in the previous chapter. However, for ease of reference, I have replicated the table below.

Table 4.1: *Abbreviations of stratum for participant narrative identification*

| Non-HR Stratum | | HR Stratum | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Participant Stratum</i> | <i>Stratum Code</i> | <i>Participant Stratum</i> | <i>Stratum Code</i> |
| Senior Managers | NHR-SM | HR Director | HR-SM |
| Middle Managers | NHR-MM | HR Practitioners | HR-PR |
| Line Managers | NHR-LM | | |
| Employees | EMP | <i>Not applicable</i> | <i>Not applicable</i> |

4.3.1 PSLB overview

A review of annual reports and internal documents show PSLB was incorporated in the 1980s⁴, offering commercial banking services throughout Sri Lanka. At the time of my research visit, PSLB had a network of over 150 branches throughout the country that catered to retail and corporate customers. The bank also engaged in foreign currency banking, treasury operations and international trade operations. The bank was supported through additional business units that can be found within normal commercial banking operations (e.g. marketing, an HRF and various risk and legal support functions). At the time of my data collection, PSLB employed over three thousand people and held more than ten percent of market share.

⁴ To protect the anonymity of the bank, several details have been outlined in broader terms rather than specific numbers.

4.3.2 Economic climate

It has been argued that external factors such as the prevalent economic climate have affected the role dynamics that the HRF plays within an organisation (Tyson, 1995). Scholarship within the empirical settings of the banking industry has affirmed the impact of the predominant economic climate's influence on a bank's internal context, and subsequently the HRF itself (Truss, 2003). During the global financial crisis (GFC), PSLB suffered significant setbacks resulting in financial losses that placed the bank's future in significant doubt.

The effects of this on PSLB were similar to the broader banking sector in general, which experienced a deep and prolonged asset market collapse (Reinhart & Rogoff, 2009). Up until the GFC, PSLB had experienced strong revenue growth through expansion strategies, but suffered across the midline and bottom line through low earnings per branch and a lack of centralised performance indicators restricting the bank's profitability.

4.3.3 Ownership and structure

Prior to the GFC, PSLB's parent company's consolidated holdings structure enabled a significant level of financial manoeuvring within the group. This entailed shifting capital between entities within the group in which PSLB was a major source of capital. Corroborated with multiple participant interviews, internal documentation, external media and financial analysis reports, this narrative reflects the financial manoeuvring by the owner of PSLB.

(PSLB) had gone through a crisis. Many must have mentioned it to you. This bank was under one stakeholder, he was managing this and all a sudden he was not in a position to allocate the capital in an equal manner at all the places. Therefore, he absorbed some more funds on the bank and invested in other areas. As a result of that there was a lack of capital equity (HR-SM).

Also under this consolidated ownership structure, a philosophy emerged that treated the bank as a means to develop Sri Lanka, and help Sri Lankans.

The earlier chairman was one who did not go after profit -instead he wanted to help the general public. So, he was running the bank in that point of view. Even during the Tsunami time he distributed plenty of money to the people affected. Likewise, he wanted to upkeep the social standard of the general public, especially the poor. So, at the beginning, we were very keen to get into this bank - I remember I was at a different bank back then (HR-MM07).

This stemmed from the ideologies of the group's chairperson/majority shareholder, and resulted in a long series of non-viable loans being given (Annual Report, 2009). With the onset of the GFC and the subsequent asset crash, liquidity became a serious concern for the bank, and subsequently, government regulators stepped in. The result was a new public ownership structure, the appointment of a professional board of directors, and several core senior management changes.

Since this time, the bank has gone through a redundancy program, and scaled back unviable branches and operations. This resulted in a reduction of the labour force by one third as well as the closure of over 30 branches. Tight systems and controls were put in place by a new CEO, and strategies were refocused on regaining customer confidence while concentrating on profitable branches and operating units. The board of directors under the new CEO's recommendation then made several senior management changes aimed at developing lean operations and a return to profitability (Annual Reports 2009-2015).

4.3.4 Bank's history five years prior to site visit

Because of strategic and structural changes implemented by new organisational actors, PSLB began to recover. Three years after the GFC, PSLB had obtained dominance in the midmarket sector (Annual Reports, 2009-2013). PSLB's total assets had continued to increase by around 20 percent per year between 2010 and 2015 (Annual Reports, 2010-2015). Its overall market share placed the bank at having around 10% of the share of the sectors' assets, loans and deposits (Annual Report, 2014).

High performance across all asset classes put the bank back into a position to grow its network, with the new strategy resulting in a return towards growing PSLB's branch network - eventually surpassing the original branch number before the crisis, but operating with less personnel within each branch. While operations were lean and performance increased, the HRF was seen in need of redress. This pertained to the performance culture of the bank and the perceived need to have an HR director capable of performative alignments between HRM and the broader organisational goals.

4.3.4.1 Market conditions result in changes within the HRF

Six months prior to the commencement of my data collection within PSLB, the bank's board of directors appointed a new director of HR. The appointment was made to a candidate from outside of the bank, as the board believed that a new approach to HRM was required to meet the desired internal performance culture. The role of HR Director continued to be a senior management position that entailed a seat on the corporate planning committee (the highest strategic planning level), with the HR Director's

position also constituting formal authority level and operational control on par with other BU leaders. As the HR Director narrates, his selection as an external candidate was seen to better enable performative changes within PSLB. Illustrated below, the HR Director narrates his appointment by the board and its desire for him to drive performance and culture change.

Basically, at a couple of board meetings, the board wanted me to take certain directions/actions or strategies immediately. 'You should drive the organisation to a performance driven culture'. Number 2, it is required for the necessity of a change of culture. Because people are so confused and not cooperative. They are not ready for participative management. This was something discussed on the board (HRM-SM).

4.3.5 Importance of human capital

In a highly competitive market place, service quality was pursued as a strategy for competitive advantage within the market. This was an area that PSLB was particularly renowned for. My analysis revealed that PSLB placed high importance on human capital, with this clearly articulated in official documentation and confirmed throughout my observations. Narratives from many of the managers who were interviewed articulated the importance of people within the bank, as obtaining financial resources for sustainable banking was not possible without the deployment of people with skills to attract capital and undertake operations. One represented quote from a senior manager illustrates this.

It's very important, it's number one. We do everything with people to people you can't forget that (NHR-MM02).

Research by Guest and King (2004) that examined the central role of HR values observed that stated values and actual values can vary. They note that “[t]he test of hypocrisy may lie in whether the rhetoric is translated into reality” (p. 410). A position strongly encouraged through an SAP approach is

the one where differences exist between the thoughts of actors and what people actually do (Jarzabkowski, 2002). While there was little contention surrounding the importance of human capital within actor discourse, there was significant perceptual difference surrounding the direction and actions the HRF was pursuing. These are identified within Chapter 5.

4.3.5.1 External market's impact of recruitment and retention

The nature of the competitive market in Sri Lanka, as well as a strong growth strategy, had strained PSLB recruitment and retention. In the case of retention, branch employees were being headhunted by competitors. The effect of this was not only the loss of trained talent, but also the loss of a significant number of customers who moved with their personal banker. Here, the quality of individual customer service (a central strategy of the bank and a core element of organisational culture) resulted in strong personal banker–client relationships. This could be leveraged in a two for one deal by competitors – acquiring quality skilled talent as well as their clients. Senior manager narratives illustrate the embedded nature of friendliness and service quality within PSLB.

The moment I came here, I felt very homely here. Because where ever you go, people greet you, smile at you. You don't have to know them. I have not seen this even in foreign banks. But it is here. We had that culture built in. It continues (HRM-SM01).

At [PLSB] we give everyone personalised banking, so we are very close to the customer. There are customers who move along with the staff member (NHR-SM04).

While overall bank culture was seen as a very positive reason to work at the PSLB, the bank's HR transfer and promotion policies, in addition to remuneration differentials between the bank and competitors, were seen as

internal elements that exacerbated external labour market pressures. For example, illustrated below, a senior manager narrates a representative remark of senior managers within PSLB:

From a strategy point of view, I think the bank tends to lose a lot of people in terms of the competitors. If you pay 15 or 20% more you can snatch them out of the bank (NHR-SM07).

A middle manager further articulates this labour pressure.

If a good person leaves and if they fit into the other bank very well, the chances are the customers will go along with the person. Most of the time that happens, at least quite a few. They may take good staff as well. They will recommend and they will be handpicked as well (NHR-MM01).

In profit centres such as treasury, where small yet highly skilled teams existed, pressures were found in terms of employee retention, also stemming from labour market conditions, and subsequent succession planning. Filling skill gaps that emerged through growth or attrition was seen to have an impact on the realisation of bank strategies. Such pressures resulted in the emergence of employee segmentation of HR practices that saw specific, high impact units being granted exemptions from PSLB's highly harmonised HR policies. A set of different HR policies were created to address the needs of specialist BUs - making employee remuneration more market and performance driven, and in these selective cases, offering some ability to hire from outside of PSLB. For the remaining BUs however, HRM transfer and promotion policies remained highly contentious.

4.3.6 Market conditions summary

Beyond general descriptions illustrating the background of the bank, this section has shown that market conditions resulted in PSLB going through

several periods of change. This entailed an initial period of financial upheaval where downsizing was accompanied by ownership and governance changes. In a second period, there was a return to stabilisation, while a third period saw the pursuit of growth. This period included the recent appointment of a new HR director in which the board of directors prioritised HRF performance orientation, and tasked it with contributing towards cultural change. Retention issues derived from growth emerged as particularly strategically significant – illustrated in my analysis of narratives that universally reflected embedded belief structures supporting the importance of human capital. Furthermore, PSLB leveraged its close employee-customer relationships within its strategic positioning. The categories that emerged within this section are relevant to later sections within this chapter as well as in chapters 5 and 6 because, from the market conditions, there is an initial emergence for an environment conducive to HR organisational change interventions. Theorists have purported the necessity of the HRF focusing on organisational change interventions to align business strategies with the management of people (Rees & Johari, 2010; Schuler & Tarique, 2007). Explicit board of director instructions to have the new HR director address performance and cultural change, in conjunction with people being central to strategic positioning, demonstrates initial evidence that the HRF was situated within a central change position. Additional sections will further develop the emergence of the initial evidence found within this section.

4.4 Laws and regulations

Paauwe and Boselie (2003) remark that while laws and regulations act as a coercive mechanism that can restrict and constrain the choices available at the organisational level, they also offer opportunities for competitive advantage to be achieved through organisational process advantage. This section identifies laws and regulations applicable to PSLB, reporting their influence upon organisational and individual phenomena that impacts the enablement/disablement of the HRF undertaking a strategic role. I first discuss labour unions' influence, then financial regulations.

4.4.1 Trade unions

Two legal and regulatory elements emerged as being contextually relevant to PSLB. The first was the labour relations framework within Sri Lanka, while the second was the financial regulatory framework that PSLB operated under. In the case of the former, trade unions are a part of the regulatory framework within Sri Lanka, in that anyone can belong to a trade union, and anyone can create a trade union. Within PSLB, just over 90% of employees belong to one of two major trade unions. The rise of unionisation in PSLB occurred because of market conditions and structural changes within PLSB.

As a result of that, there are two unions that got together and became stronger than other parties. They capitalised it, but they capitalised the gap between the management and employees. There's a huge gap. The union came in and capitalised on it (HR-SM).

The pre-crisis ownership structure was extensively narrated as having an organisational culture that cared for and valued employees.

Trade union positions, however, influenced two central core practices that have significance for this study. First, the unions took strong positions towards internal retention and filling roles by promoting employees from within. This resulted in a contextual dynamic that affected hiring practices, with the HRF having to fill roles internally from within the bank. Within several business units, tensions stemmed from this policy. Specifically, regarding competency alignment and mapping, the HRF was found to exhibit a limited ability to map competencies, with many participants narrating the difficulties of this. The limited pool of talent that some BUs could draw from meant that a greater reliance was placed upon up-skilling or cross-skilling, in addition to identifying the competencies of staff who would be transferred across roles.

Whatever you plan, if you don't have the human capital, then you have a problem, unless HR addresses those issues, you have to go through the HR and get it sorted. We have a lot of policies to recruit internally, you need HR to look at all these and provide the resources (NHR-SM03).

[Not having competency maps] creates problems. We have to address that. For example, operations guy, wouldn't know credit - the branch suffers (NHR-SM01).

In some cases, BU senior managers did not expect the HRF to map or understand their BU's competencies. Rather, any competencies needed for a role were articulated to the HRF without any concern for the HRF developing maps of skills. In these cases, BUs simply required the HRF to place advertisements vacant or new positions. Such narratives – as represented by one senior manager – tended to come from senior managers who worked within more specialist areas.

Whenever we need a staff member we say this is the criteria and qualifications we expect them to look at, that they wouldn't build up themselves (NHR-SM08).

4.4.1.1 HR practitioner's alignment to union positions – identity tensions emerge

For most individual HR practitioners, the practices of internal hiring through transfer was largely narrated as a reality, which was not broadly seen as a constraint to operations. In many cases HR practitioners identified with these principles. This created a division within the narratives of HR practitioners, with some participants supporting this position, while a small group were frustrated by such constraints – as illustrated by one HR practitioner narrating:

We get pressure, a lot of union pressure. They say, offer any position to the internal staff first, to see if they are competent. Among us to be fair, there are competent people, so it's our responsibly also to keep them happy and keep them going (HR-PR04).

Other than the two personnel within the HRF - the director of HR and the deputy director - all other HR practitioners within the HRF had experienced a role transition to the HRF. That is, none of the HRF initially started their career in HRM. Furthermore, almost all HR personnel, except for the director and deputy director of HR, had extensive tenures within PSLB, with all but one having started their career in PSLB.

While several HR practitioners pursued HR qualifications once in the HRF, and had varied tenures within the function itself, role transference identity issues emerged from my analysis of HR practitioner's positions towards labour union derived policies. These presented themselves as a central theme in the way HR practitioners subsequently undertook activities towards different units within the bank.

Pritchard (2010) illustrated in her research the identity tensions that can emerge when transitioning from generalist HR to strategic HR. Within PSLB,

HR practitioner identity was also observed as having a bearing on the implementation of different practices. HR practitioners that had transitioned from other parts of the bank to join the HRF largely felt an affinity for the 'look after your own' position of the trade unions, as they themselves came up within such a position. In contrast to this, external HR specialists (those who joined PSLB more recently as HR specialists) articulated the importance of optimal competency alignment, which essentially did not support a 'look after your own' position.

To conclude this subsection, my analysis identified that HR policies stemming from trade unions resulted in (1) constrained hiring practices, confining the HRF's actions surrounding policy. (2) Considering these constraints, some business units sought competency mapping to address policy hiring constraints, while others did not. (3) Those with HR practitioners who came from specialist HR backgrounds, entering the organisation from the outside, reported orientations towards perusing process advantage (Paauwe & Boselie, 2003) – in that they looked towards competency mapping as a means to mitigate policy constraints. (4) Counter to this, HR practitioners who came from within the bank and transitioned to HR roles largely did not see the union's influence on hiring policy as a constraint.

The implications of this subsection's findings to my wider research is the first indications of variations of sought HR activity surrounding policy by different BUs, as well as different cognitive interpretations by HR practitioners surrounding union derived HR policies. I therefore present the first items of evidence that contribute to two major themes that occur throughout

subsequent sections and chapters – variations of individual HR cognition and activity that is based on Banker vs HR specialist identity frameworks, and the emergence of sought differentiated HR activity from BUs to suit different employee groups. Subsequent sections further support these two identified themes.

4.4.2 Financial regulation

Like in most financial sectors, Sri Lanka is a regulated one. Regulatory elements were found to play a strong role in PSLB's structure, and these in turn impacted organisational and individual level phenomena surrounding HR practitioners' strategic roles, as well as strategic sensemaking mechanisms. Overall, organisational regulatory compliance was strongly embedded within the PSLB's organisational culture. Financial regulation was most contextually relevant for senior management heading business units of consumer finance, legal, treasury and risk management. Given the span of activities within these units, actors had to habitually take into consideration the regulatory impact of their actions.

The influence of regulation on daily situated activities emerged in several ways. The first was on systems and processes within the bank in general - with the HRF also having to operate within such frameworks. This resulted in a high focus on internal control through processes and systems, across almost all areas of the bank. Financial systems were of course strictly controlled, but a regulatory mind-set also appeared to have wider influence on practices and praxis. The two narratives below demonstrate a propensity towards systems, control and risk mitigation from senior managers who were career bankers.

[...] we have the regulators who give us direction as to how we should manage risk. So, based on that, what we do is, there's an integrated risk management framework, under that we have the policies, procedures and the structures (NHR-MS03).

[...] it is a good thing that we bring a lot of new controls from the legal side, and put in a lot of perspective from a regulator's point of view (NHR-SM09).

4.4.1.1 Financial regulation's impact on practices

A rigid process structure was observed across much of the bank where there was no legal necessity to do so. Like the process driven operating environment, where financial risk or regulatory frameworks required a rigid vertical structure of sign-offs for policies, this process was also found in seemingly mundane HR practices where approvals cascaded upwards. The strategy formulation process itself was a formal driven event. The framework for strategic planning overall, can broadly be described as centralised, top down and planned, yet incorporating bottom up perspectives in the major formal strategic revision session through the inclusion of broader stakeholders in formal workshops. Specific variation and phenomena surrounding the HRF's role in this is outlined in subsequent chapters. One senior manager narrates:

[Strategic planning], it's a process, it's a banking process which has been streamlined. One is of course internal direction itself, but at the same time it is a part of the regulatory framework also. Having a streamlined process for the strategy is being reviewed even by the regulators. Such inputs from them also have been bought in. It's two ways, one the bank's own strategic plan, plus the one with regulatory inputs incorporated (NHR-SM03).

4.4.2.1 Regulation's impact on strategic planning

Responsibility of coordination of strategic planning – also internally referred to as the corporate planning - was placed under the control of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), but undertaken jointly by all the senior leadership in

a planning session at the beginning of each calendar year. Those involved in strategic planning were referred to as the Corporate Planning Committee. These individuals were all the heads of business units and senior executives within PSLB, designated within this study as NHR-SM for non-HR heads of units, and HR-SM for the director of HR, who also had a seat at the strategic table. The centralised strategic planning process entailed annual revision of the strategic plan each planning period, and then a complete revision every five-year period. The strategic plan being followed at the time of my data collection was the 2012-2016 strategic plan. This meant a new five-year cycle was due to be undertaken in the beginning in 2017.

The corporate plan is undertaken by the senior leadership. We say this is where we are today, and where we want to go up to 'X' in 2016 - for that what we need. All of this is percentage driven (NHR-SM10).

What lacks is the inability to see the gaps and fill in those gaps. The environmental gaps that are emerging (NHR-SM01).

The strategic plan took on the form of a lean document that outlines numerical performance indicators that were required to be achieved. These were negotiated by the Corporate Planning Committee, and approved by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO also played a strong role in directing these outcomes, although the CEO's role was broadly regarded as inclusive towards the CPC. However, as outlined above, the strategic planning document was numerically driven, with little articulated analysis or articulation of the context surrounding drivers of performance, or of a stipulated means for achieving performance metrics. This numerical approach aligned well with regulatory frames of reference and a financial lens towards the organisation, but this also

played a role in ambiguity surrounding strategic HRM. One non-career banker senior manager narrates the strong driving force of finance upon strategy.

That is a problem here. Finance tries to play too much of a dominating role and that is disruptive and not constructive. Finance is one stakeholder in driving strategy of the bank, it can't be the dominating factor (NHR-SM02).

4.4.2.2 Strategic ambiguity

Strategic planning documents in pluralistic settings have a propensity to create ambiguity (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Cohen & James, 1986; Denis et al., 1991; Stone & Brush, 1996) despite the common sense expectation for them to create clarity (Abdallah & Langley, 2014). Strategic ambiguity within texts – and upon reading them – can be recognised through the contextual discourse of actors who consume these texts. Subsequently, strategic ambiguity has been shown to influence variations in strategic outcomes, with the consumption of strategic discourse playing a role in the enactment of planned strategies (Abdallah & Langley, 2014).

Within PSLB, ambiguity was found to embed itself into the larger schema surrounding the role of the HRF. The influence of strategic ambiguity, in part stemming from the strategic plan, was found to play a role in the variations of perceptions of HR performance, the level of strategic integration with business units, and actual HR practices.

4.4.3.1 Ambiguity, centralisation and structure

Regulatory dynamics were also influential in driving PSLB towards greater centralisation of activities across operations. Performance logics, in addition to strong regulatory logics, meant that after returning to profitability post GFC, PLSB looked to further enhance profitability through centralisation -

moving away from authority at the periphery towards approvals being centralised. A central member of the bank's CPC notes:

The context is now different. Back then it was to strengthen the bank and get it up and adjust some of these issues we had. But now we want market share and growth. That's what we are looking at... What we did was, in the last few years, the branch managers have a thing called delegated authority where [t]he[y] could approve all those [elements] to the centre. Now, the branch manager can approve only a 2 millions loan, where the region can approve about 5 million, and everything else is approved at the centre (NHR-SM07).

Structural changes resulted in senior managers increasing their span of control, while efforts continued to centralise authority away from the periphery.

Even on the HR side, if you looked at us when we came in, we probably had about 36 senior managers, today we are down to about 24. So, there was a downsizing of the senior management, where the roles became much wider and people were made responsible for certain other functions as well. Everything like the security and all were standardized (NHR-SM07).

The impact of this was found to influence the needs and requirements that business units sought from the HRF. A central element of SHRM is the degree of strategic integration with organisational business partners (Golden & Ramanujam, 1985). However, the contextual environment for business units varied in the degree of the additional span of control of BU heads, as well as the subsequent ambiguity that stemmed from structural changes. Some business units faced little change to their span of control. Their environments were more stable, with such stability allowing these units to draw from recursive practices of the past.

Other units had greater degrees of instability through greater structural delegation. This exposed some leading actors to broader contextual elements.

⁵ Unless otherwise articulated, all currency values discussed refer to Sri Lankan Rupees. At the time of data collection, 100 Sri Lankan Rupees equated to roughly one New Zealand Dollar.

One BU head remarked not only on their rapidly expanding scope, but their understanding of their responsibilities.

My portfolio has been growing and I only hear certain bits and pieces, and now I have so many roles to take on, and it is not clearly laid out to me. I only hear about these things (NRM-SM02).

This unit head was given responsibility for three disparate areas that required broader frames of reference. Other managers had additional responsibilities placed upon them that had narrower frames of reference, which resulted in lower levels of role conflict. The nature of such variations could be seen to influence the tensions of role expectation of the HRF, and subsequent role enactment. In some cases, roles aligned, and in other cases they were perceived as greatly misaligned.

What is notable however, is that greater degrees of strategic integration have largely been argued to represent more value within the literature – while not always realised (cf. Sheehan, 2005). However, different sensemaking activities are identified to result in vastly different perceptions of strategic integration. While the literature generally prefaces configurations resembling, or equating to Golden and Ramanujam's (1985) *integrative linkages*, a number of business units preferred typologies that constitute one-way linkages for example.

I found that when an organisation is broken down into unit-level analysis, a broad array of strategic integrative typologies occurs in business units. The perceived value of such structures entails different strategic frames of reference. The reflexivity of such dynamics is also illustrated. That is, the influence of sensemaking upon the praxis of the HRF then feeds back into the praxis of the business unit, and vice versa. The mechanisms of this are

illustrated in Chapter 6. The intent of the present chapter, however, is to illustrate that extra-organisational context has played a role in varied structural configurations within the bank, and such configurations have become a central element in addressing my research questions more specifically.

4.4.2.3 Regulation's impact on training

Regulatory and legal contextual factors were found to influence hiring and placement practices for some employee segments and business units, and subsequently the HRF's role in training practices. Responsibility for placement and training were central practices for the HRF within PSLB. A number of positions within the bank were required to be filled by qualified individuals under regulatory frameworks – often requiring external qualifications.

To carry out some roles within treasury and risk management for example, employees were mandated by law to hold and maintain specialised certifications - trading operations are one such example. In such instances, these roles were also seen as distinctive and unique, with discourse segmenting these categories of employees as “different” and “specialised.” Comparative discourse, differentiating the needs of these employee segments emerged at several levels. The regulatory requirements for training and qualifications were framed by some BUs to differentiate their employees. The explicit connection to regulation was overt and linear. That is, the law requires that some employees have specific qualifications or training to do their job. Such training was subsequently unable to be addressed internally by HRF – as narrated by a senior manager running a specialised BU.

This is the most specialised area in the bank, I mean it's the only area specified by our regulator where they state that there's specific set of qualifications and set of skills required (NHR-SM06).

On another level, unit heads that control the operations in which these “specialised” roles occurred, built upon the regulatory requirement to further frame these employees as experts. Therefore, the overall unit they operated within was perceived to need to be engaged by HR practitioners differently than ‘the rest of the bank’ where skills were not as specialised. The experience and qualifications that were required, because of regulatory and legal factors, resulted in these employees being viewed in a different context by their employers - a world apart from the needs of the broader bank. This framing further supports the emergent evidence presented in subsection 4.4.1 surrounding the segmentation of employee groups.

Some of these functions require expert knowledge, risk management is something that came up in the last decade or so and a lot of people don't have much of experience, not even me. I have been a corporate banker. You need experts, especially market risk, you need someone from the treasury background, credit risk we need someone who has done actual credit. We have actually taken people with those backgrounds (NHR-SM08).

Jackson et al. (2014) advocate the benefits of treating employees and their managers as inseparable partners to understand the dynamics of employee segmentation. Observed within PSLB, the heads of several BUs, operating within strong regulatory environments, built upon regulatory qualifications and market conditions not only as justification for segmentation, but also in their framing of strategic practices related to HRM.

HR still does not totally understand specialised areas, and how to differentiate the specialised areas and cater to them. This is a challenge in most organisations (NHR-SM10).

The emergence of BU occupational identity

Occupational identity was a theme that emerged in the discourse of the BU heads of three units. Professional identity manifested itself in terms of performance outcomes, and the role 'experts' played in the delivery profitability for PSLB.

We had to train people, and suddenly when they leave we have to get and train more new people and that too affects us. There may be an effect on the performance of the bank too. When they left, it took some time for us to train the new people and all of that. It has impacted performance of the bank on the treasury side. [Our unit] is a highly specialised unit that accounts for 50% of the profit for the bank (NHR-SM11).

The specialisation of expertise within units that had high regulatory, legal, and technical requirements was found to affect how the HRF could support these units directly and indirectly. In terms of training, the HRF itself had a strong emphasis on training employees. My review of training records identified some 36 training programmes that attended to compliance and specialised areas. Out of a total of almost 70,000 training hours, covering 6,192 participants, compliance training accounted for over 13,000 hours and almost 2,000 participants. This constituted just fewer than 19% of the total training hours, and represented the second largest volume of training behind general banking practices (209 programmes and over 34,000 total hours).

However, the extent of technical expertise required within business units with high regulatory oversight, or within units that acted as watchdogs of compliance, meant that the HRF did not train employees in these domains. With respect to training, these units dealt with training internally themselves, or had personnel seek qualifications outside the bank. As one HR professional notes:

Those places, they develop their own staff, they take care of their staff, and they have limited number of staff (HR-PR09).

The phrasing of “those places” within this HR practitioner’s discourse also infers some form of detachment. Such an inference was also found to be representative of the implicitly understood detachment from the HRF with units with specialised needs. These were found to be a part of a broader schema of identity issues stemming from HR practitioners’ role transference from bankers who largely came up through the branches to enter the HRF and become HR practitioners.

The aspect of specific training, is something that [the HRF] should be focused on. In my annual budgets I have training and got it approved. I feel, the training that we do, is it directed well enough to get whatever we want done. I think HR shies away from technical staff, as they do not understand what our actual training needs are. But then again, it's a question if HR links with me and say shall we set up this and this that would do. I would want more training done in the senior manager, chief managers because they are the future (NHR-SM10).

Regarding extra-organisational context, it can be said that within PSLB, the legal and regulatory contextual elements had a role in employee segmentation, fostering attitudes towards the value and worth of employees (Boxall, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014; Lepak et al., 2006; Lepak & Snell, 1999b), and the degree to which the HRF supports units and employee segments.

4.4.2.4 Impact of regulation on placement

For the HRF itself, the regularity environment also directly affected the design and implementation of HR practices. Directly, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) required a system of employee transfers that mitigates the risk of employee fraud. Such a system rested primarily on an HR practice driven by the HRF. This entailed the transferring of any individual who was in any

branch for more than a four-year period. Two HR practitioners explain the impact of regulations on staff and their roles.

...[W]e have a transfer policy as well, where a person can [only] serve a branch for 4 years, it's a CBSL requirement, since it's a financial institution, they don't want anyone to be in one place for a long time. To take precautions, we keep them moving in the same zone so they get a good exposure, and it will be beneficial (HR-PR03).

[Our relationship with branch managers is] quite strong because if I give you an example. Transferring a person, we have to adhere to the central bank rulings and policies where a certain person can't be working too long period in a branch, so we have to send them elsewhere after 4 years. So, when transferring, we always get in touch with the area and branch manager informing that they will be removed from here and where he will be introduced to where we will talk to the area and branch there as well. Even performance management, it all comes from the line management. I would say the line relationship we have is quite a relationship (HR-PR05).

4.4.3 Laws and regulations summary

The contextual impact of laws and regulations on PSLB and their effect on HR related phenomena were illustrated within this section. Most significantly, laws and regulations were found to confine policy options around hiring for the HRF. Additionally, regulatory frameworks for banks resulted in a disposition for top-down strategising that was driven from the centre of the organisation. As such, early evidence was provided around PSLB's structure creating strategic ambiguity around the strategic role of HR practitioners (with the HR Director an exception to this). Identified phenomena stemming from my analysis of legal and regulatory factors also introduced two HR practitioner identity structures (Banker and Specialist HR), as well as occupational identities within specialist business units. In both cases, these identity constructs resulted in different cognition, and in turn variations of sought (BUs) and delivered activity (HR practitioners).

4.5 Institutions

Institutional forces shape organisations by placing pressure on them to conform to certain structures that represent a legitimate way of doing things within the broader environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This conformity at times can be in contrast to efficiency logics (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Seeking the acceptance of regulators, who have oversight responsibility and authority over an organisation (Baum & Oliver, 1991), is an example in which conforming may not meet the preferred ends of the organisation (Galaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989). Here, “managers may compulsively conform to rules and regulations postulated by the state of norms of the larger society” (Galaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989, p.455).

This section discusses institutional forces, and their influence on PSLB. It addresses competing logic structures, building upon phenomena identified in previous sections – namely, change and performance identified in section 4.3, and identity constructs that emerge in section 4.4.

4.5.1 Social connection

Social connections are among a number of mechanisms that drive conformity, resulting in normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The degree of connectedness between social actors therefore influences the adoption of logics and behaviours (Deephouse, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Galaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989). In the previous section I illustrated the contextual importance of regulations, and from an institutional perspective, that too offers an explanation as to the way practices emerged and were adopted within PSLB. The desire to seek legitimacy was shown to influence

structures, systems and actions of actors within PLSB in the findings of that section.

Also discussed in the previous subsection were the influences of the trade unions upon internal hiring policy. As noted, this resulted in very few people consequently being recruited from outside of PSLB. The average employment tenure across PSLB was very high by industry standards. As a result, PSLB also had far lower levels of social connectedness with the outside, with limited cross-fertilisation of ideas and logics entering PSLB. A desire to incubate and train talent from within PSLB – stemming from union pressure – consequently inhibited the ability to benefit from capabilities and experiences of actors who worked elsewhere, and elements that outsiders could bring with them in terms of their experiences from other organisations and the wider field (Battilana & Dorado, 2010).

Battilana and Dorado (2010) reported the value of outside talent entering an organisation within their case research by attributing performance outcomes to the balanced inclusion of outward looking hiring practices. Undertaking this is done to draw value from personnel within an organisation who do not subscribe to embedded organisational logics. They also note the tension this creates, and the importance of facilitating a balance between logics as a means for a shared organisational identity. The strong emphasis on hiring from within PSLB, in some respects resulted in PSLB's accepted way of doing things being insulated from outside actor networks. This, coupled with a strong organisational culture, created a contextual situation from which explanations of observed variation of HR practices - and how these practices were

undertaken - can be traced to. Two themes discussed in the section 4.5.2 below offer explanations to this.

4.5.2 Competing Logics: Insiders and outsiders

Emergent tensions between “insiders and outsiders” within PSLB were observed. These constituted tensions surrounding new ways of doing and defensive positions towards ingrained logics and ways of doing – as illustrated by the narratives below.

We need people from outside, then they come with different exposure, skills and experiences, that's healthy, we need to have more people like [the HR Director] (NHR-MM05).

One is it blocks the avenues of the internal employees it might have a negative impact and they might move out because they can't see a career path. Plus, the new comers don't know the proper history and then they tend to make decision without consulting people purely because they don't know how it is properly (NHR-MM06).

Outsiders, who started their careers outside of PSLB, tended to reference their previous experiences in their previous work settings outside PSLB. This was often done to legitimise actions and thoughts, and to contrast activities in PSLB that ‘outsiders’ felt did not represent an accepted way of doing things. These outsiders, although few, were all represented at higher levels within the organisation, predominately at the senior management level.

These individuals entered the organisation to address extra-organisational market conditions stemming from the global financial crisis (GFC). Their recruitment was imposed by regulators, and coincided with a drastic change in strategic positioning of the bank, largely at the behest of a new board of directors. This entailed a shift in the dominant logic of ‘caring’ and ‘helping’ – what Battilana and Dorado (2010) refer to as a ‘development logic’ – to a new

logic of maximisation of profit. Such a position can be considered the dominant banking logic (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). Such tensions are found within my analysis to remain.

4.5.2.1 Developmental and performance logics

Despite employees largely accepting the necessity to transition to performance logics (given the immediate fate of the PSLB during the GFC), such a shift was not without challenges (Glynn, 2000; Heimer, 1999; Zilber, 2002).

Subsequent tensions emerged around the older developmental logics of PSLB and the new performance logics that came from the small yet highly influential group of outsiders now holding senior management positions in PSLB. These tensions were in part resolved by accommodative behaviours (Inhelder, 1962). These accommodations reflect how actors within the organisation interact with their environment. The introduction of new management practices within PSLB resulted in the assimilation of some structures and logics introduced from the outside (Fürth, 1969; Inhelder, 1962; Jarzabkowski, 2004).

However, Fürth (1969) notes that constricted experiences lead to narrower assimilation of structures, and this reduces the ability to accommodate unfamiliar external happenings (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Accordingly, PSLB's logics can be seen to co-evolve in some areas, and not in others. For example, core embedded organisational logics such as 'friendliness towards customers' remained uncontested, and was even reported to be further embraced as a core distinctive competency of the bank. Other introduced performance practices that attended to customer service - entailing measurement and evaluation -

were also reported to go uncontested, and accordingly quickly assimilated.

Two represented statements illustrate this - one by a senior manager who came from outside during the GFC, and one from a long-term employee that is classified as "employee" under my multi-level analysis. They illustrate the assimilation of previously embedded customer service logics and introduced performance logics attached to this.

Under the family business, the bank had a high value for service orientation. So that continues. You will see, I come from a bank that was considered as the "best team in the country", best bank kind of thing. The moment I came here, I felt very homely here. Because where ever you go, people greet you, smile at you. You don't have to know them. I have not seen this even in foreign banks. But it is here. We had that culture built in. It continues (NHR-SM01).

Within the HRF, HR practitioners themselves indicated that the 'family culture' not only remained, but was a point of pride and difference for PSLB and its personnel. This family culture was also reported by actors across other strata. At the individual actor level within the HRF, this family culture resulted in individual HR practitioner efforts to develop competencies surrounding customer support as well as desires to provide high levels of internal customer service. Such values in some sense acted as validating the importance of the HRF.

Number one is the culture, it's the friendly culture. It's almost like the family. From the moment you come out from home you don't feel like you're away from the family. It's the relationship that has kept me going (HR-PR03).

Any organisation should be target driven, I understand in this competitive environment. At the same time, we also got to ensure we give our guys the strength and the confidence that we are there with them which is not there... We come from a different culture and we are now used to this slow-moving thing. In times like that if we are really in competition, this is the thing we got to go there give the guys strength and assistance and make them understand how to plan and how to do it (HR-PR05).

However, other performance logics that were more distant to customer service were found to remain contested by some groups of actors – reflecting the Jarzabkowski (2004) position that tension between adaptive and recursive behaviours can continue. This was found to be the case with HR practitioners and subsequently had a bearing on the HRM role expectations and variation of activities - as actors from across PSLB worked within this contextual situation to deliver value. Accordingly, *insider* and *outsider* actors can be understood to come in part from different frames of reference – different logics. Insiders come from an isolated and often recursive practice structure, and outsiders, having been exposed to more normative environments, make sense of strategic and operational episodes differently.

Actually, they are smarter [than the older managers at PSLB]. But they don't go with [PSLB] family. They can do things better, they are well paid, and they have to go for their targets, but the thing is we are not ready to accept those changes (HR-PR05).

4.5.3 Impact of institutional forces on HR practitioners

The two most senior members of the HRF, and one other HR practitioner at the middle management level who also had significant experience outside the bank, were the only three HR practitioners who did not spend significant time within PSLB before transferring to PSLB's HRF. It was found that these outsiders shared different logics than the remainder of the HRF. In addition to organisational logic differentials, there were also professional identity differences. Two of these three outside actors were also highly experienced career HRM practitioners, while the rest of the HRF can best be represented as bankers-turned-HR-practitioners. Such a dynamic created an environment in

which different sensemaking structures took place. The second most senior HR practitioner, an outsider, remarks:

There are only two HR specialists here. I have been here for three years and [the director of HR] only for six or seven months...I don't think [business units] are very impressed, they see [HR] as a waste of time. That is because we have never had proper HR until now. Now it's changing with [the director of HR and I]. [He is] a technical guy, he knows his HR, now we're getting into it. Slowly heading there (HR-PR05).

The two senior HRF specialists can be classified as having been more exposed to a normative environment from their outside experiences – being more technical in their craft. In contrast, other HR practitioners without a specialised HR background largely made sense of strategic episodes through internal organisational logics. This was a result of less normative exposure, and from having undertaken the role transition from banker to HR practitioner.

The head of HR notes:

Everything is there, appraisal system, HR system, good training, the strategies are there. But the thinking, the way they act, the way they react, the way they talk, overall productivity everything is not realigned. So, I wanted to first change their thinking, the way they think and react (HR-PR01).

One HR practitioner, the only other HRF member to also come from outside of the bank, came from a general banking background, and yet transferred to HRM. This individual also framed PSLB's situation within his own external frame of experience.

When I compare [what is happening here] with the Tokyo work I have done and all, it can't be compared at all with here (HR-PR07).

In contrast to this, insider HR practitioners referenced the way things *used to be* in many instances. Tensions between insider and outsider logics can be

seen to emerge. HR practitioners who had served their career within PSLB referred to the tensions of these logics coming together.

When I was young, I had got a lot of opportunities to go abroad. I didn't want to do that because we love this institute. That time the management treated us like family members. Now it's too late to go with my age. So, I work for my salary and do my best for my staff members and subordinates. I am here to help the staff members. That's my motto (HR-PR04).

The above representative narrative of an insider HR practitioner illustrates an affinity for looking after people aligned to pre-GFC developmental logic that positioned people above profit. It is also indicative of actors drawing upon recursive practices and structures - the ways things were.

4.5.3.1 Tensions resulting from opposing logics

The tension between reconciling older developmental logics and the new performative logic later manifests in the variation of activity by different groups of HRF practitioners. This is illustrated in how HR practitioners interact and integrate with business units, and how HR practitioners frame strategic and non-strategic activities. The role transition of many HR-practitioners from the branches can be seen to subsequently impact how such practitioners made sense of their HR role. One HR practitioner remarks on this.

[...] they are not very HR oriented technically competent guys. Most of these guys are bankers although they are sitting in HR. And most of these guys are coming from branches, and alas, you don't have to have technical expertise to do what they are doing. As long as you can understand the customer service aspect of it and do it. I would say a very average competence level. We don't see people in the HR department interested to find out what best practices are, what the industry is and how they do it and if there's anything on the internet to download it and see if we can do away with something and adopt a best practice. Outside box thinking, that's very average I would say (HR-PR05).

Within the group of HR practitioners who transitioned from the branches, an identity spectrum existed between banker and HR practitioner, moving along a continuum of bankers identifying themselves more as HR practitioners. The banker element however, remains a strong part of their identity, with the value and importance of originating from banking narrated as a distinct advantage.

The four narratives below illustrate elements of the banker-HR identity continuum. This entails a strong attachment to past work in the branches, and a very strong desire in influence change because of past experiences.

Narratives also illustrated how non-HR experiences and skills were framed as being important in adding value to HR practitioner work.

We came to the HR department, that's the difference. That's a major difference. We came from branches and we saw what's happening in the other end. We came here, we wanted to help the people who were there, who needs assistance, so we have seen the branch side and we try to accommodate and cater to the requirements of the line management. Because we were bought in from the line management and that is the major difference really (HR-PR09).

Well, I would say if you take me for example, though I am attached to HR, my knowledge and expertise are outside of HR.... One might call me and say I am not an HR person, but that is not the case. You need people on different disciplines, joined together to have the HRF. The deliveries and capabilities of me would be different to someone having a conventional HR PLATFORM. HR in today's context I would say, you should have more focus on the strategic and not on the admin level. It used to be sometime back. Beyond issuing a caution letter and firing someone. That is not HR, that is personal management (HR-PR03).

I came in 2014, I was the [branch name] branch manager there. As a branch manager it was very difficult for me to perform. So, I thought if I come to a department, I can give my service better than a branch manager (HR-PR06).

Actually, in my personal view, I prefer the mix. Because you need to understand the core business also, if you bring only HR qualified people they wouldn't understand the core business. This is commercial bank, so you should know a little bit of that too. When you are instructing a branch person, it should be coordinated with the normal banking scenario therefore I prefer the mix not only the HR professionals (HR-PR07).

4.5.4 Institutional context summary

To conclude this subsection on institutional context, evidence was found that institutional dynamics produced competing logics which resulted in tensions surrounding the doing of HR work. Identifying issues of different HR practitioners, varied institutional logics within the HRF, and structural configurations of business units contribute to the identified variation of praxis and practices within PSLB.

4.6 Culture

4.6.1 Introducing cultural context

This section briefly explores the context surrounding cultural context. As with the previous subsections, this is framed to show how extra-organisational context interacts with meso and actor contexts. This section first illustrates general elements of Sri Lankan national culture on PSLB practices. I then address the cultural attitudes within Sri Lanka towards family and female gender roles - illustrating the subsequent impact these have on placement and promotion within PSLB.

4.6.2 National culture

National culture plays an important role in influencing the HRM of organisations (Luthans, Welsh, & Rosenkrantz, 1993; Newman & Nollen, 1996). Macro institutions such as socialisation, family and education influence cultural values, which impact organisational culture and organisational HRM (Khilji, 2003). Macro national culture elements were found in PSLB to influence the dynamics of micro interactions (see Tayeb, 1995; Tayeb, 2001) along the same lines it has had in other research (see Khilji, 2003).

4.6.2.1 Developing countries' national cultures

Employees within developing countries possess significantly different values than those from developed countries (Chandrakumara & Sparrow, 2004; Mendonca & Kanungo, 1990; Nyambegera, Sparrow, & Daniels, 2000). Sri Lanka was an early promoter of gender equality (Chandrakumara & Sparrow, 2004) and has similar literacy rates to developed countries (Chandrakumara & Sparrow, 2004). Management approaches of Sri Lankan managers have also been shown to approximate those of Western management philosophies in respects to power distance, collective attitudes towards families resembles Asian characteristics (Nanayakkara, 1993 as cited in Chandrakumara & Sparrow, 2004).

As a former British colony, the English language remains an important part of commerce and trade in Sri Lanka. A majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil population requires English to be used as a means of communication between ethnicities. "Though Sinhala is the official language of administration, a fair amount of departmental as well as intra-departmental work is 'unostentatiously done in English'" (Fernando, 1977, p. 347). Within PSLB written and spoken English was used. All formal meetings occurred in English, as did all written communications within the bank (documents, emails, processes, etc.). English was also extensively spoken in social settings within the bank as well, although I did witness on several occasions English conversations switching to Sinhala intermittently. This was done at the employee level, and not witnessed at any other level (although it is entirely possible that it does occur).

Additional significant Sri Lankan cultural norms that provide cultural context are best summed up by Chandrakumara and Sparrow (2004). They note:

Sri Lankan managers maintain power distance and individualistic cultural traits. They, however, tend to exhibit collective traits in family and other social interactions. It has also been observed that Sri Lankan management practices evolved from the British system prior to its political independence and has adopted mostly similar Western management practices since independence [...]. [A]lso note[d is...] progressive firms in developing countries tend to mimic the practices of successful organisations from more industrialised nations (p. 566).

A unique contextual variation to emerge within the PSLB case setting was the category of 'homemaker'. Narratives from female participants often referenced 'a women's homemaker role in family life'. National culture placed strong pressures on them to attend to their family. Here, the family would not be able to function without their direct daily control. With women being central to managing their extended family, career progression opportunities were impacted.

4.6.3 Impact of home life on HRM practices

The importance that women place on family interactions was found to accompany discourse by females around transfer and promotion policies within PSLB. As already discussed, policies of hiring or transferring from within to PSLB, rather than from outside, were enacted broadly across the bank. For women to progress their careers they were required to transfer to another branch, often out of their region, and away from their family. As women play a central role within Sri Lankan family dynamics, this was often not possible. One employee remarked:

That's a big thing, I have 2 children and I have to look after them, I can't keep them alone in Colombo and go elsewhere (EMP-03).

Other participants challenge the HRF's ability to understand common-sense problems for women regarding transfers and promotions.

The thing is when it comes to transfers, I have this friend she has 3 kids - she leaves home at 4:45 in the morning to reach her branch by 8, and then she leaves it at 5 in the evening and only makes it home by 8 30 at night. Half the time she's on the road, she hardly gets time to spend time with her family. So, our transfer policy only transfers for the sake of it, then it gives you a transfer option, and say if you don't take it, you don't get the promotion, which from my opinion is very wrong. Their productivity levels are very low with their mind always at home because of these. For the guys its fine, but the ladies they travel so much. So, their productivity levels are very low, they wait till 5 to pack up and go, where as in if you get branch closer to their home, they will even stay till 6. What they say is, at an emergency I can run home. I know a lot of people like that. These are very hardworking people I know. Even they say that their productivity levels are so low (EMP-05).

Once they gave me a transfer to Badulla -that's about 108 KM away, at that time my small child was born and I said I can't go. That is the only opportunity they gave me, but it is not a help for me (EMP-04).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has used the extra organisation component from Renkema et al. (2016)'s framework to illustrate the external environmental impact on internal context. This was done to preface several the themes found within the following two findings chapters. Key elements outlined in this chapter include the impact of the external environment on managerial change, and the institutional logic shift from a developmental to a performance logic. Such a shift however, did not remain uncontested, and was illustrated in the identities of HR practitioners towards their views of HR practices and praxis. Equally so, identity structures of senior managers were shown to emerge between insiders and outsiders, as well as professional identity. As such, this section has provided preliminary evidence surrounding variation of sought activity from senior managers aligned to identity, as well as different HR practitioner identities. This chapter has provided indications that these identity differences

result in different ways of conceiving SHRM, as well as different praxis frameworks to deliver SHRM.

CHAPTER 5 - RESEARCH RESULTS INVESTIGATING HR STRATEGIC ROLES

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the roles, practices and praxis that HR practitioners undertake in their daily work. I do so to better understand how situated activity, micro-structures and localised context influences notions of *being strategic* for PLSB's organisational actors. This is done as an avenue to investigate what *being more strategic* entails (Björkman et al., 2014; Pritchard, 2010; Truss, 2003). This chapter accordingly addresses the research question:

1: How strategic are HR practitioners in the development & implementation of practices across different business units?

Addressing my first research question requires acknowledging that HR practices are situated in the lives of those who design, implement and use them. Mantere (2005) notes that although practices are sometimes illustrated in rather abstract terms in much of the dominant quantitative scholarship, they are everyday occurrences that transpire in the lives of organisational actors. I therefore focus this chapter on illustrating *how* and *why* (Yin, 2014) strategic practices transpire between the lives of HR practitioners and the BU actors with whom HR practitioners interact.

From a SAP perspective, strategising encompasses the “actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors, and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity” (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008, p. 8).

Issues that are strategically important, or what individual agents *call* strategic, are matters an agent reports as crucial for organisational success, survival or completion of its mission (Mantere, 2005). Thus, such assessments are highly contingent on contextual issues surrounding an actor. While not every interaction between HR practitioners and BU actors is necessarily strategic, or should be viewed with this lens (Johnson et al., 2003b; Westley, 1990; Whittington, 2003), a SAP approach is acceptant of the position that each episode of *doing* by research participants presents the opportunity to reflexively influence strategic thinking or action.

5.1.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins by briefly providing a contextual overview (5.2) of PSLB's BUs, outlining the number of BUs within PSLB and how they operated. In section 5.3 I conceptualise strategy before reporting the strategic structures that PSLB's HR practitioners formally participate in. I then investigate subtler strategically relevant phenomena that HR practitioners influence, or are influenced by, in the practices and praxis of their daily work. To do this, I use Ulrich's (1997) 'HR Role Model' to investigate the relationships between HR practitioners carrying out their HR roles, and the impact this has on what BU actors deem to be strategically important. This includes reporting strategically relevant phenomena surrounding practices and praxis within the HR practitioner's roles of change agent (5.4), employee champion (5.5) and administrative expert (5.6). Finally, in section 5.7, I conclude this chapter with a summary of the results as they relate to research question one.

5.2 Business unit contextual overview

There were nine BUs within PSLB - including the HRF. BUs described in this thesis are the highest order division of distinct activities found on PSLB's organisational chart. In PSLB, senior managers were tasked with running BUs. Some BUs were profit centres, while others were cost centres. All BUs operated within a strong process structure due to the nature of the extra-organisational regulatory environment of banking. Unit level strategic discretion was found to be available for those running their units if their actions met broader organisational strategies and adhered to regulatory frameworks.

The nature of this strategic discretion meant that cost centres (e.g. information technology, marketing and the HRF) were not subservient to profit centres or other structures. Rather, partnerships occurred between BUs. The CEO of PSLB held significant strategic influence through formal sign-off processes, and through taking a central role in the coordination of strategic direction. Yet, BUs still maintained full ownership of what they did. One senior manager discusses the strategic positioning of the CEO by recounting:

I think it is key the CEO gives the kind of direction he does, and that comes down to the next level - if I don't have direction to guide and lead my team then there's an issue. He knows what we are doing this way. Sometimes I will tell him, because without his support I wouldn't be able to do it. We work very flexibly. I have complete ownership of what I do. (NHR-SM10).

Some BUs were significant enough in size to incorporate larger subunits. In these cases, subunits were also run by senior managers. These subunit heads were also a part of the Corporate Planning Committee, yet had one additional reporting line than their senior manager colleagues who were not leading a

subunit. BUs that did not have sufficient size to warrant subunits subdivided into departmental divisions. These were run by middle managers. Within PSLB, senior and middle managers dealt with the HR function daily in BUs located on the corporate campus, while within the branch network, line managers also had significant contact with HR practitioners.

5.2.1 Conceptualising strategic themes

Across all levels of analysis of participant interviews, there were a total of 559 micro-narratives that were coded as 'strategic'. Mintzberg (1978) argues that rather than strategy being formulated, it is *formed* through the participation of multiple actors across an organisation, in a pattern of collective actions.

Strategy formation therefore encompasses both the creation and implementation at executive and operative levels (Mantere, 2005). The coding of the narratives from each level of analysis are illustrated in Table 5.1. The table shows the stratum of analysis, the number of participants within that stratum, and the number of narratives coded as 'strategic'. In line with my subjective epistemology, coding allowed participants to determine what was strategically relevant (Mantere, 2005).

Table 5.1: Summary of strategic narratives

| Stratum | Number of participants | Number of narratives coded as strategic |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Senior Managers | 12 | 368 |
| Middle Managers | 17 | 107 |
| Branch Line Managers | 8 | 13 |
| HR Director | 1 | 24 |
| HR Practitioners | 9 | 32 |
| Employees | 8 | 5 |
| Total | 55 | 549 |

5.3 Formal strategic structures

As discussed in my literature review (2.4.5), whether or not the HRF is embedded within high level formal strategic structures is often used to differentiate strategically aligned positions from administrative ones.

Strategically aligned roles can be distinguished by “the hierarchical position of the HR department (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997), the participation of the senior HR manager in the strategic planning process (Golden & Ramanujam, 1985), and the discussion of strategic matters at a senior level (Storey, 1992)” (Brandl & Pohler, 2010, p. 1026). This section reports where and how the HRF is strategically embedded within formal strategic structures.

5.3.1 PSLB strategic plan development

The broad strategic planning process within PSLB required BUs to come together at the beginning of five-year strategic planning cycles to develop the bank’s five-year strategic plan. Annual revision and alignment sessions would

then constitute major formal strategic episodes throughout that five-year period. A senior manager illustratively notes:

So, full planning was done in each of the areas and departments. And every year [in] our budgeting process, at the end of the year it is based on this strategic plan. And there's a monitoring mechanism too, to ensure all these implementations are done (NHR-SM07).

Stemming from major strategic planning sessions every five years, and then episodes of annual revisions, objective targets were given to organisational units, with strategic champions tasked with the responsibility of progressing direction towards these objective targets. One head of a SBU illustrates this by noting:

We have a meeting - earlier it was monthly and now it's quarterly - where I sit with the CEO and project champions who are responsible of those action points and ask them the progress report on where they are, and understand the blocking points and why the delay (NHR-SM07).

5.3.1.1 The role of the HR Director in strategic planning

The current HR Director was not within the organisation at the time of the formulation of the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan. However, the previous director did represent the HRF in these sessions, and was involved in all formal strategic organisational sessions that took place until the current directors took up their roles six months prior to my data collection. Upon the new HR Director's arrival, formal structures remained largely unchanged, although as later discussed, the praxis of the new director did change significantly within and outside of the formal mechanism in strategy formulation. As such, strategic role criteria including the HR Director's participation in strategic planning processes (Golden & Ramanujam, 1985), and HR discussing

strategic issues with senior management (Storey, 1992) were also found to occur in PSLB.

5.3.1.2 Strategic placement

The HRF's desire to be included in formal strategy formation has surrounded much of the legitimacy discourse within HRM scholarship. In PSLB, the HR Director was included in all formal organisational level strategic planning mechanisms. While the HR Director did not have a seat on PLSB's board of directors, neither did any other senior managers. The CEO was the only executive director on the PSLB's board. Kelly and Gennard (2007) found in their research that the locus of strategy formation seldom occurred at the board level. Rather, most of strategic decisions were made by the Chief executive officer group (CEOG). This was also the case for PSLB. The significance of this for my research is, high-level access (representing the basis of legitimacy concerns) by the HR Director, which occurred within PLSB's locus of strategic decision making.

The HRF's structural positioning also meant it was unanimously seen as a powerful BU in its own right. Senior managers reported that "HR is on top" (NHR-SM01), is "very important" (NHR-SM06) and "is considered one of the main pillars, because they take care of people" (NHR-MM07). These are three reflective narratives of the overall structural positioning and importance of the HRF for PSLB participants. Accordingly, at the organisational level, the hierarchical position (Hope-Hailey et al., 1997) of the HRF can be considered, largely, to be strategically placed.

The HR Director and the corporate planning committee

During my on-site data collection period, I attended one of the monthly Corporate Planning Committee meetings attended by all senior managers.

Over the course of the three-hour session I observed eleven separate references to human capital. Three were directed towards the HR Director by other members, and two by the CEO. The remainder occurred in general discussions where the HR Director was not directly asked a question, but entered the conversation.

My subjective assessment of the meeting dynamic was that the HR Director was included in strategic assessments and able to comfortably enter strategic conversations. Consequently, further evidence of the HR manager being actively involved in high level strategic planning processes was found.

However, being placed in a position to engage in strategic discussion, and actually being engaged in strategic decisions are not one and the same.

Evidence would however suggest that in PSLB's (fortnightly) corporate planning committee gatherings, the HR Director was both placed and active in strategic discourse.

The HRF's strategic legitimacy in PSLB

Because of the HR Director's strategic access and activity, the prevalent HR legitimacy concerns calling for the HRF to have a seat at the strategic planning table, or to be in a position to influence strategy, can be said to be fulfilled in PSLB. However, the purpose of the findings already reported have not been to declare HRF 'strategically aligned'. Rather, they provide evidence that high-level strategic connections existed for the HR Director, and that

these were found to be strong. The subsequent analysis of HR-BU interactions within this chapter however, reveals interesting insights into different degrees of HR strategic connectedness outside of collective strategic planning by the Corporate Planning Committee.

5.3.2 HR practitioner ambiguity within formal strategic planning

My analysis of HR practitioners' narratives highlights significant ambiguity pertaining to their formal strategic contributions (i.e., a belief they are active in strategic formulation when this is not actually the case). This impacted the shape of emerging strategic HRM actions within PSLB. Unlike the HR director, practitioners lacked a clear and unified understanding of the expectations of the organisation, as well as clarity surrounding what they should do, and even what they did to enact a formal strategic role.

5.3.2.1 Ambiguity over actual formal strategic participation

In their narratives, HR practitioners framed the HRF as being involved in the formal strategic planning process. The first narrative below illustrates a belief that HR practitioners are involved in the strategic planning process – although they themselves were not within the HRF during that period. The second narrative refers to a progression from the HRF not being strategically orientated in the past, but the belief that it has progressed to a point of strategic focus, in which HR practitioners participated in formal strategic planning episodes.

We decide on a plan which will span out for 2/3 years. Which we have now, might expire this year, so at that point we get involved. At that time when it was happening, I was not in HR. Every department, business partners, everyone get (sic) involved. It's a bottom up approach where everyone works together and decides on certain things and numbers and finally get into a model where they can take the bank to the next level (HR-PR02).

Back then they were more concerned on the day to day operations, no scientific or methodical basis to determine the staff required in a branch.... But now HR takes part of the strategic planning discussion and we understand the needs of the business and we are well aware of the number of branches coming up in the next few months / years, so we are getting ready to address all the needs with regards to it. (HRM-PR05).

Yet, upon further enquiry, while all HR practitioners were familiar with the broad formal strategic planning process, only one HR practitioner had actually been involved in a formal strategic organisational level planning episode (one five-hour stakeholder workshop). A representative narrative of HR practitioners that had joined the HRF after the implementation session was:

[w]hen I joined here, it was an ongoing thing, so there was no requirement for me to go through it (HR-PR02).

HR practitioner narratives discussing the HRF's strategic involvement in formal strategic planning reflected a broad tone of positivity surrounding PSLB moving away from historical and recursive patterns surrounding strategic participation. Strategic planning had previously been undertaken by senior management alone, excluding the bottom up derived inputs of HR practitioners in organisational level strategic planning. There was a belief that the newer organisational strategic planning adaptive practices – of which HR practitioners were believed to be included within – represented significantly greater utility and merit.

5.3.2.2 Enacting strategic beliefs

Also, identified within HR practitioner narratives are positive beliefs towards the HRF being strategic. In affirming the importance of the HRF having a strategic role, one HR practitioner narrates the need for the HRF to be at the board level, while another articulates the need for the HRF to be strategic.

HR is no more a back office [function] I think. Now in the modern HR world, the Head of HR will deserve a seat in the board room (HR-PR03).

HR in today's context I would say, you should have more focus on the strategic and not on the admin level. It used to be sometime back. Beyond issuing a caution letter and firing someone. That is not HR, that is personnel management. (HR-PR03).

However, there also appears to be degrees of rhetorical hypocrisy within some broader HR practitioner narratives. Guest and King (2004) observed rhetorical hypocrisy in the discourse of executives towards the importance of people.

Executives would talk up the importance of people, but not pursue activities that supported their discourse. My analysis reveals that this occurs with some HR practitioners around the term 'strategic'. Aggregate HR practitioners talk up the word strategic, yet their activities and actions are not aligned to this – nor aware of it. For example, misinformation as to the extent of an HR practitioner's engagement within formal strategic planning reflects this.

My analysis revealed evidence that everyone within the HR function was aligned to making a positive impact on the lives of those within PSLB. This appears central to the thesis of what being strategic entails, as practitioners affirming positive ideals around being strategic entail a complex web of tensions. Tensions arise between structure and agency, within one's own identity, and in how HR practitioners can best effect change.

In this respect, HR practitioner identity themes (found in sections 4.4 and 4.5 of chapter 4) emerge again. For example, HR practitioners that exhibited stronger specialist HR practitioner identities tended to reference tangible pathways towards what the general literature would consider strategic. This entailed negative assessments surrounding communication of strategic direction.

The strategic message is not even going there. We should be taking it down there. Once we plan it, we have plans in our minds and documents, and those we should make a practical plan with them (HR-MM05).

Other HR practitioners that had stronger banker identities, did not attach any significance to using planning documents to formulate and navigate further states of direction, nor was there a propensity for reviewing plans.

5.4.3.3 Strategic communication pathways

The upward and lateral communication structures of the HRF were found to centre on the HR Director. For example, access to strategic documentation and forward states of planning came through the HR Director. Only a limited number of HR practitioners were found to have any actual connection to the strategic plan, and those that did only had segments of the plan through the HR director.

Actually, it's communicated from [the HR director] and cascaded down to me [...] The relevant section of the Strategic Plan is copied to me, so I have an idea as to what will happen (HR-PR03).

The actual structural configuration of the HRF was also very process orientated. That is, HR practitioner (team leaders) led units that were functionally derived. i.e. legal and discipline, compensation and performance, recruitment, staff enablement and benefits, training, etc. This HR internal configuration resulted in several HR practitioners articulating no need to review the strategic plan.

There won't be many reasons for us to refer anything for our thing. It stands alone (HR-MM06).

Another HR practitioner answers my question if they have knowledge of the strategic plan.

No, I follow procedures (HR-PR01).

Furthermore, upward communication was mediated through the HR Director.

One HR practitioner notes:

In the banking context anyways, there's a formal structured communication. If I want to talk about something to [senior managers] I have to go through [the HR Director], but on the other hand, if the CEO wants to get something done, he might talk to me directly (HR-PR02).

Additionally, HR practitioners were found to formally meet only once a month. However, these meetings were not narrated to act as a crafting mechanism for strategic planning but to deal with present issues related to their roles.

Most of the time we discuss about the present situation. (HR-PR06).

There are limited examples of HR practitioner praxis accessing higher level strategic references, as well as limited identified agency by HR practitioners to seek pathways to do so. Rather, the centrality of the HR Director reflects upward communication to senior managers. This suggests broadly that HR practitioners were constrained by structural and organisational cultural elements in developing and planning structures.

5.4.3.4 Strategic notions associated with change

Change was an element to emerge around what being strategic entailed for HR practitioners. In my analysis, HR practitioner' notions of strategic utility were not often associated with their integration into formal strategic frameworks. For most, conceptions of strategy began to emerge in a disposition towards change. This is something that many current HR practitioners had experienced in their previous banker roles, before they joined the HRF.

We came here, we wanted to help the people who were there, who needs assistance, so we have seen the branch side and we try to accommodate and cater to the requirements of the line management (HR-PR09)

5.3.3 Summary of formal strategic structures

My findings produce evidence that the HR Director was included within all formal strategic management structures. The HR Director was found to be highly embedded in formal organisational strategic episodes. HR practitioners, however, while positive towards the idea of inclusion within formal strategic planning, and narrating positive discourse towards the utility of the HRF being strategic, were themselves largely not active within overt and structured episodes within formal strategic frameworks.

There is also limited evidence of HR practitioners in aggregate accessing strategic documents. Moreover, upwards communication and access to organisational strategic references was largely mediated through the HR Director – i.e. accessing strategic documentation, and strategic communication with unit managers outside of the HRF.

5.4 Change agent

5.4.1 HR Director's change orientation

Within PSLB, the HR Director identified strongly with the role of change agent. As the new HR Director was appointed by the board of directors to address change, there was no ambiguity as to his role. The HR Director was additionally invited to several board meetings after his appointment, in which the role expectations were explicitly made clear. The HR Director notes:

Basically, at the couple of board meeting, the board wanted me to take certain directions/actions or strategies immediately. 'You should drive the organisation to a performance driven culture'. Number two, it is required for the necessity of a change of culture. (HR-SM).

The HR Director articulated a strong orientation towards organisational performance outcomes. He notes:

After looking at the balance sheet and previous year's performance, we must understand where the challenges are. Based on that, these [financial metrics] have given us a bigger picture. This is our concern, based on that we have to react (HR-SM).

The HR Director also showed a strong propensity for change across PSLB.

[My corporate management colleagues] try to give us an indication as to where the problem is. Then we have to present something where we are getting close to the overall idea. That is where it is getting connected. Similarly, we discuss same thing with the line management as well (HR-SM).

Change agent from the HR Director's narrative incorporates organisational performance alignment using financial metrics, and an understanding of the unique problems from BUs and line managers, with the HRF providing proposed documented solutions for these problems. Such elements are closely aligned to the consultancy skills of a change agent role depicted within the literature (e.g. Adams, 1991; Caldwell, 2001, 2003; Hunter, 2006; Kenton, Moody, & Taylor, 2003; Kenton & Yarnall, 2012; Robinson & Robinson, 2005; Wright, 2008; Wylie, Sturdy, & Wright, 2014). Wylie et al. (2014), however, note that the literature on change agency outside of HRM scholarship has been concerned with forms and approaches that are aligned to particular contexts (e.g. Ottaway, 1983). The following sections will draw upon agency to explain practices that have both generalised characteristics and localised idiosyncrasies (Jarzabkowski, 2004).

5.4.1.1 Senior manager perceptions of HR specialist vs banker identity on organisational change

Across senior manager participants in PSLB, I found that a specialist HR practitioner assuming the role of HR Director was received positively. The significance of this in the narratives of senior managers is reflected by three temporal distinctions, or critical junctures within PSLB. The first was before the GFC, the second was post-GFC in which overall organisational change associated with newer performance logics took root, and the third was the transition of leadership from the past HR Director to the current one.

All twelve senior managers reported highly favourable positions to the HR Director now being an HR specialist. The value for them was *change*.

Analysis showed that the perceived *banker* identity of the former HR Director was almost entirely articulated in negative references. My analysis identified 30 narratives that surrounded the HR specialist vs banker identity construct of the HR Director. Of these narratives, 27 presented instances where a banker identity of the HR Director acted as a disabling force for units, while three were neutral. BUs sought change and strategic contribution, yet the previous HR Director's banker identity (focused towards administrative HR positioning) held little strategic value for PSBL's senior managers.

Representative remarks on this by senior managers include:

We were not really doing HR, we were taking one-person from location A to location B to location C. [...]. With [the new HR Director] coming in, the old thinking went off. A career banker was running HR. Now we have a career HR guy who sees things differently (NHR-SM01).

Back then we had a HR head who was once a banker; but HR has developed into a science and you need an accountant to sit in the CFO chair, you can't get a general banker. So, there is more to HR in terms of successions planning, talent management, and career development. All these things need to be addressed, not just the compensations and benefits. So that's why when the previous person left we recruited

a HR guy from outside. HR now has changed, because back then HR just paid your salary on time and paid your bonus if you did well, but now it's far more than that (NHR-SM07).

The articulated value of the new HR Director's specialist background, in addition to the recognition that change was being actuated, aligns to Wylie et al. (2014)'s finding that the role of a change agent can be associated with *credibility through expertise*. In PSLB, *then and now* narratives illustrate the desire for action and strategic alignment. Senior managers narrated HR 'specialist skills' as being crucial in rectifying bank misalignments. I found that as such, credibility was accordingly afforded to the new HR Director by senior managers.

5.4.2 Organisational level vs unit level perceptions of HRF value

The HR Director was found to be highly valued in narratives that contextualised the contribution to the bank 'as a whole'. "He's great for the organisation" (NHR-SM06), "he is a career HR guy, and that is what we need - not bankers" (HHR-SM01) and "the bank needs this specialised approach" (NHR-SM10) are representations of the new HR Director's acceptance and credibility when framed through skills that can be seen to offer value to aggregate organisational impact.

Interestingly however, my analysis also finds that when senior managers drew upon their own situated activities within their respective units - beyond that of the organisation as a whole - narratives began to emerge that were sometimes contradictory, i.e., "It's a system driven issue which HR should address" (NHR-SM01), "when dealing with top staff, HR kind of like runs away (NHR-SM10). There were senior managers who maintained their positive

perceptions of HRF strategic utility, but who contradicted their rhetoric when referring to actions occurring specifically within their units.

Such contradictions can be understood through rhetorical positions of organisational actors developed by Jarzabkowski, Sillince, and Shaw (2010). Where contradictory narratives appear, BU assessments were more inclusive of the aggregate HRF as opposed to being directed solely at the HR Director. During day-to-day activities, several BU's across PSLB relied on the collective contribution of the HRF, not only the specialist skills of one individual alone (the HR Director). Here, assessments were more reflective of *credibility through adding value* (Wylie et al., 2014). Such assessments were not based on organisational impact abstractions or future possible value, but on daily practices and praxis in which BU senior managers relied upon collective HRF activity.

5.4.2.1 Middle manager perceptions of HR specialist vs banker identity on organisational change

Analysis of middle manager narratives resulted in 28 narrative clauses coded to the categories of 'strategically relevant' and 'change orientated'. These categories emerged across 13 of the 17 middle manager participants. Like senior managers, middle manager participants from this study also largely narrated positive perceived changes of the new HR Director.

Enquiring as to the participant's perception of change occurring with the new HR Director entering PSLB, a middle manager centred their narrative on the impact of the HR Director, but suggested in their remarks that change needed to extend beyond the HR Director to HR practitioners.

Yes, a huge change – before, the [previous HR Director] was admin focused, so I was referring to him as the admin function. But he is alone there (NHR-MM02).

Other middle manager narratives value access to the HR Director, and his personal disposition to listen.

But we are fortunate to have a head for HR who is very positive looking, and he has not kept his doors closed, allowing us to go straight to him conveying whatever it is. Actually, my experience I had couple of weeks ago, has changed my attitude towards HR, because I got the solutions spot on (NHR-MM04).

It is much better. Changed in the sense they listen to us, they try to accommodate to us, 2 or 3 years back they never listen. But we were forced to listen and accept. But now they do listen and try to accommodate, improved (NHR-MM11).

Two other middle manager narratives draw attention specifically to the HRF bringing about change, more reflective of utility sought in the HR Director being a change agent.

No, now it's a new person and I think he wants to bring in a change. Person wanting to bring in a change also makes it all different (NHR-MM10).

Yes, because it changes on a personal way, whenever the head of HR changes the management style also changes.

To conclude this subsection, across middle managers, there are largely positive perceptions of the HR Director's influence on change, with openness to engagement being a core element of perceived value.

5.4.2.2 Line manager and employee perceptions of HR specialist vs banker identity on organisational change

With line managers and employees, there are only isolated instances of change agent narratives that reference the HR Director. No indication is found that his specialist HR identity is associated with positive or negative perceptions of organisational change. Unlike the senior and middle managers, perceptions of change were not found to significantly shift at the point of the HR Director

entering the PSLB. Rather, temporally, change is expressed over a longer period of time, and unsurprisingly confined to fewer, and more and specific coded categories.

5.4.3 Behaviour change

Behavioural change was a strategically significant category to emerge from within my data that aligned with the role of change agent. This category was identified from senior, middle and line managers' narratives.

5.4.3.1 Senior, middle and line manager perspectives on changing attitudes and behaviours

For some BUs the importance of behavioural change was of significant strategic importance, with narratives exhibiting long-term strategic implications for PSLB.

Senior Managers

The challenge of change towards attitudes and behaviours within the Sri Lankan national context was articulated to be difficult by one senior manager in their narrative shown below.

In this country the behavioural changes are not readily accepted. Even if we give the best thing, there's always difficulty in changing behaviour. There's a certain amount of resentment. It can go a long way where the misinformation makes people believe their life can be ruined (NHR-SM01).

Behaviours and attitudes were classed as strategically important in the narratives most noticeably by two senior managers. The first two senior managers lead BUs that were regularly involved in areas where a broader scope of activities occurred (NHR-SM01 and 02). The need to change attitudes and behaviours was explicitly linked to SHRM. One senior

manager's narrative articulates the HRF needing to be aligned to cultural change in their first narrative, and their own role within change in the second.

Philosophically from a big picture point of view I guess it's wavelengths and understanding the roles. You were talking about strategic HR and to me forget about everything to do with HR nuts and bolts. At a very broad sense, its understanding the culture you want to make for the vision set in (NHR-SM04).

Me coming here is also was to take the bank out of that culture. All work together on a common objective kind of thing (NHR-SM04).

More specifically, the overall culture of the bank was seen to support behaviours that were not enabling performance by some senior managers.

For me for my products, none of it can it be delivered without the people having the right attitude, without the right level of motivation, skills and competency and the drive to deliver the service. It is strategic HR to me, because they have to provide the right foundation or the experience for the staff to be able to deliver it to my customer (NHR-SM02).

There are certain staff members who have not being promoted for some time, there's a drop in their productivity. If they have not been promoted for several occasions, then the productivity comes down. Very difficult to get them to get them performed from that point onwards (NHR-SM12).

In these two narratives, there is an inherent link between employee behaviours and the ability to deliver services of strategic importance. In the first narrative (NHR-SM02), attitudes and behaviours are framed more as being associated with competencies that enable performance. This participant also articulated in their interview that it was an employee's mind-set towards proactively engaging with external customers that was the missing desired behavioural competency. While customer service was reported to be very high, behaviours needed to go beyond merely looking after customers with a smile to creatively offering what this participant refers to as "suitably aggressive customer solutions".

In the second narrative (NHR-SM12), it was the promotional policies and

practices that resulted in disabling behavioural change. Here, behaviour, change and strategy were linked to the stalled promotions of staff, that in turn affected the motivation of their cadre of staff. This subsequently resulted in the emergence of behavioural traits that hindered BU performance outcomes. This was narrated as a road block to the unit achieving stated performance targets.

Middle Managers

The narrative shown below tends to reflect the views of middle managers from BUs that undertook a broader scope of activities. Their narrative is directed towards the link of behaviour change and performance, and articulates the need for change in the HRF's approach towards improving people for performance reasons.

HR should involve in continuous improvements of my staff including me. They should have a continuous discussion on training and specially finding some kind of criteria to discuss the performance of my staff. I should be able to say; this kind of executive should perform in this way. These are the things they have to achieve; these are projects they have to complete on time. I should have a clear idea on all that. Those are the activities the HR can involve with me and decide on. My final structure, performance levels of those people skills required, how do we train them, how do we transit from this place to that ultimate level, how to reduce the staff, how to manage the existing staff, how to do it in regular intervals, how do we manage people who are not performing, the people who want to go to other places (HRMM02).

Line managers

The importance of the HRF's role in influencing attitudes and behaviours for performance outcomes was also strategically framed by line managers. A line manager responded to my enquiry surrounding their branch Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). They noted that while line managers play a role in the development of personnel at the line level, the HRF plays a key role in providing them with personnel which are suitable to operate within the

performance framework. This also linked elements of behaviour, culture and performance together. This was generally reflective of the line management within branches. They note:

No, it should be a strategic thing. When [the HRF] recruit people, the people should have the same vision as the bank's vision. Otherwise if their targets and passion are different, they will not fit into this mood. It's like a square peg and a round peg thing (NHR-LM02).

This section has shown strategically important behavioural issues associated by PLSB participants that link to the HRF and its change agent role.

Particularly, there are performance linkages demonstrated within these narratives that show a path of how such change would enable BU and organisational performance. The strategic relevance of behavioural change was most noticeably relevant to participants that operated within areas where a broader scope of activities occurred, including points of connection with the customer.

I now progress to the practices and praxis that the HRF employed towards behaviour changes. My analysis resulted in the identification of two BUs seeking similar forms of activity from the HRF, yet receiving significantly different forms of praxis. This offers an interesting ability to examine an idiosyncratic example of practice and praxis variation. It is particularly interesting because what was sought from the HRF (actual ways of doing) was the same, yet what was enacted was different.

5.4.3.2 Localised idiosyncrasies - different perceived impacts on the HRF delivering change

When undertaking my analysis of change agent, I uncovered a localised and idiosyncratic phenomenon between two senior managers. Regarding culture change, these two senior managers both narrated the strategic significance of the HRF being involved in this change. The way the HRF was perceived to deliver change was, however, found to vary, as was the assessment of the impact on the delivery of change. For example, stark differences presented themselves between two BUs. In the case of NHR-SM01, the practices and praxis used by the HRF in addressing change were not perceived to deliver strategic value, with the senior manager being largely critical of the HRF's approach. HRM-SM02's assessment, however, was highly favourable. In both cases the frame of reference towards change is squarely centred on strategic impact of the praxis utilised by the HRF.

Within both situations, the contrast was found along three lines (behaviour modification, planning, and behaviour modification measurement). Despite both senior managers sharing the same views and ideas around the strategic importance of behavioural modification (expected strategic contributions from the HRF and the importance and value of planning and measurement), their experiences and interactions with the HRF were significantly different. These similarities and contrasts are shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Variations of change management praxis

| Area | HRM-SM01 | HRM-SM02 |
|--|----------|----------|
| Orientation towards Behaviour modification | High | High |
| Experienced Behaviour modification | Low | High |
| Perceived value towards HRF planning | High | High |
| Experienced value though planning change | Low | High |
| Perceived value towards measuring behavioural change through innovative measures | High | High |
| Experienced value HRF developing innovative behavioural measures | Low | High |

Regarding understanding the strategic utility of HRF towards these two BUs, my analysis illustrates that similar expectations of how the HRF should be contributing did not result in similar perceptions towards successful impact. In determining what elements resulted in this variation of activity, my analysis uncovered evidence around informal networks facilitating the delivery of action. Closer social ties between NH-SM02 and the HR Director were found to occur, and this suggests that variations of praxis can be explained in part through their personal relationship. Björkman et al. (2014) point to the potential for informal social networks to influence HR practices and praxis. Senior managers that meet informally have been shown to generate opportunities for the persuasion of a particular strategic vision (Boje, 1991). NHR-SM02 discusses his informal network ties:

The first day I met him, I knew there was a difference. The way he talks to people and all that, the earlier HR person would be frowning at people all the time. This guy actually talks to people, smiles, good morning, and all that. Seeing that, it was the first step for me to build a relationship with him. In the lunch room we meet, we had a chat, talk about a lot of personal things too and that's how the friendship progressed, and how it really progressed was over a drink (NHR-SM02).

There is also evidence that in conjunction with personal relations, there is a shared vision of what both the HR Director and this senior manager wished to achieve.

I thought finally, this is really cool, the reason is until then I was talking something alien to the previous guy. And we are both here for the same goal (NHR-SM02).

This would suggest that it was the close social interactions and network ties between NHR-SM01 and the HR Director that resulted in the HR Director prioritising working with NHR-SM02. This is discussed further in Chapter 6 (6.3.7).

5.4.4 Attitude and behavioural change practices and praxis by HR practitioners

This section begins by discussing the practices that the HRF used to direct behavioural change (5.5.4.1), and then goes on to discuss the interpretive structure towards strategic change, and identify misalignments stemming from downward (towards the line) and upward (towards BU managers) sensemaking (5.5.4.2)

5.4.4.1 Mediums of directing behavioural changes

My analysis of HR practitioners' narratives reveals there was surprisingly little realisation that employee cultural change was of strategic significance to some senior managers. HR practitioners were aware that customer service was a central, ongoing position in the bank to which their practices should be directed, yet there was little awareness of the need for broader cultural

changes needing to move the workforce towards performance improvements, nor of the role they could play in that. For example, little activity was found to be narrated by the HRF around thought being placed towards how attitudes could be changed, nor integrating themselves using interpretation of datum from performance metrics to become more integrated in performance outcomes. The extensive use of a KPI system within PSLB is an example that I will now discuss.

Interpretation of Key Performance Data

For the HRF, the KPI system offered a means to better become more tangibly connected to BUs. These converted abstract philosophies surrounding people, change, performance and the HRF into pathways that could link the HRF and BUs together in a partnership. Narratives by some senior managers and HR practitioners referenced this in their strategic discourse.

With pressures for BUs to deliver on performance levels outlined in the strategic plan, and organisational personnel being regarded as central to achieving this, the strategic plan's performance goals were broken down into KPIs. One HR practitioner was responsible for the implementation of the structures around the KPI system, and operating the system.

They note that this was based on the strategic plan, and that the HRF were tasked with running the system.

Setting up KPI's is based on the budget plus strategic plan (HR-PR02)

In my role what I do is we set KPI's to the individuals. From the CEO level to the key management personnel, (KPM) ensuring it is getting cascaded to the bottom. Whatever the target decided by the bank, will be done by achieving individual KPI's of banks (HR-PR02).

This also entailed collecting the data and reporting it to the CFO monthly.

Every branch was monitored for branch performance. Department and business units were monitored against a set of performance indicators, while employees also received their own KPI metrics. The development of KPIs cascaded down from the top of the organisation.

Now CEO's KPI's are set by the board of directors, and then we have the key management personnel who directly report to CEO, that is designed by the CEO and approved by the board of directors. Then it's a matter of it being cascaded down to the lower levels. So basically the [senior managers] will give the KPIs to the department heads, and they will give it to the chief manager, likewise it will cascade to the front liners also (NHR-SM02).

While the HRF was involved in coordinating the whole exercise, my analysis found no use of any of the data around people based activities and behavioural change used by the HRF. This is surprising given that the HRF had rich data, and that this offered a mechanism to address the concerns around analysis of data as the basis for expert HR forward planning.

Accordingly, facilitating a change in behaviour impacting organisation performance, the HR function, and HR practitioners in particular, appear to have limited integration. Rather, a more administrative role of coordination of the activities was observed which entailed one-way upwards interactions, without any value addition being provided. Such information was also not found to be used for the basis of training by the HRF. Training was in fact the only other place that the HRF sought to influence behavioural changes.

Training

Within the HRF, the training department was officially tasked with behavioural and skills development. One of their new training programmes was aligned specifically towards behavioural mind-set change. When I asked

the HR practitioner where the greatest amount of their time was devoted to currently, they responded:

At the moment we are doing a program called mind for success and team building, afterward we will do a customer service training program that is to motivate our staff and to make them happy (HR-PR08).

The HR practitioner placed priority on these programmes as “[they thought] these three programmes will help to motivate our staff members, will make them happy to achieve the organisation goals”. Accordingly, evidence exists that broader mindset changes sought by some senior managers were being addressed, and that strategic contributions were occurring.

However, the HR training department based its training on a broad framework that did not incorporate drawing from any strategic documents, relying on direct communications from BUs to develop training programmes.

We'll be getting the strategic requirements from the top management and from the circulars, and we all will be able to get the [required] knowledge, and accordingly we will plan the training programs, and according to the newest trend, we will do it (HR-PR08).

Direction also came in the form of emails or telephone calls stating training requirements from BUs. Training programmes would evolve based on these interactions.

We don't have a plan, we have a framework, so based on that we align our training. It's now structured as a bank, the customer service is the main thing, so to align to that thing we will plan training programs, product knowledge, technical training programs and interpersonal training programs. Everything will be planned according to that (HR-PR08).

There was active agency on the training department's part to develop training structures aligned with the bank's overall strategic direction. This would suggest a degree of strategic connection. However, there are also structures

that reinforce pure transaction. Here, BUs passed down formal communications as to what to train their staff on - one-way to HR practitioners. They were essentially told what training programmes to develop, and used their knowledge around training to do so. This one-way framework around a strategic high priority shows few change agency characteristics aligned to the role of change agent.

Senior manager NHR-SM01's BU was seeking change agency from practitioners that entailed planning and integration characteristics for the specialist HR function to deliver value, as further articulated below.

[T]hey have to do their homework and get them identified and take them to a pool or teach them the skill they are lacking and that kind of coherent integrated plan I haven't seen (NHR-SM01)

These were not delivered through training, as circulars stated what training was needed – inhibiting the ability to create broader integrative frameworks as sought by NHR-SM01.

My analysis found however that there was little contention around the delivery and quality of training across all levels of analysis.

The training is really good. This is now, currently (NHR-LM01).

[The quality of training is] quite high, other banks don't think twice when recruiting our staff there (EMP-05).

The HR manager was involved in higher order training development, and the setting of agendas. There appears to be awareness and significant activity occurring around training from the HR Director, yet at the HR practitioner level, without direction from the HR Director, there is an absence of two-way relationships between BUs and HR practitioners. A two-way relationship

between BU-stakeholders and HR practitioners would have supported a framework that could have offered additional value in addressing the expectations of broader HRF contributions. However, my findings suggest understanding of the broader strategies and how value could be created through training was mediated through the HR Director. Consequently, HR practitioner strategic roles are confined to implementation.

The theme of the HR Director mediating HR practitioner upward interaction is a common theme found within my analysis. While it is often required for managers to control activities, there appears to be a general absence of two-way upward interaction from HR practitioners themselves. I therefore now discuss HR practitioner elements around interpretive frameworks for HR practitioners from which sense can be made of change agent expectations.

5.4.4.2 HR practitioners' interpretations of strategic change

HR practitioners drew their sources of interpretation of change agency from places they were socially situated within. Particularly, it illustrated that isolation from upward sensory sources, such as access to strategic documentation, and readily available ways to communicate with senior managers (discussed in 5.3), countered the role enactment sought from senior and middle managers. In turn, there are instances of their actions disabling actors.

Changing employees' perceptions of the HR function

With other HR practitioners outside of the training department, change agent narratives emerged within interviews relating to behavioural changes. While the HRF Director and the BU senior managers focused their change agent

narratives towards strategically changing employee behaviours for performative outcomes, the HRF practitioners tended to associate behavioural change with changing perceptions of PSLB personnel.

HR practitioner activities around behavioural change entailed influencing employee behaviours towards the willingness to speak with the HRF, to resolve their individual problems. Portraying empathy towards employee situations (Welch & Welch, 2012), and influencing personnel to feel comfortable coming to the HRF to resolve issues was a significant element of many HRF practitioners' identities, according to the interviews conducted with them.

In the narrative below, the employee champion role strongly emerges. However, this is also associated with a strong orientation towards behavioural change through trust, where practitioners sees themselves as change agents. Welch and Welch (2012) create the role category 'emotional' within their study where "empathy emerged because embedded HR personnel were going through the same experiences as other project team members" (p. 612). This category is applicable to HRF practitioners, yet from their perspective this is seen to be a change agent.

I have changed the culture here. Before I came, no one can talk to these people - [they had learnt] you have to keep your mouth shut. I said no, call me at any time, I'll try to help you out as much as possible (HR-SM).

The blurring of change agent and employee champion are evident here, yet from the HR practitioner's narrative, such change was of strategic importance. While the HR practitioner narrated a lack of any meaningful agency to influence policy, and accordingly future focus, they saw their change agent

role in the day to day episodes which over time would influence aggregate perceptions of the HRF.

Misalignments in downward and upward sensemaking

Other elements of change agents relating to behaviour changes are found within the HRF, in the role of discipline, for example. While this would largely be considered as administrative, the impact of this in the context of behaviour was articulated as being of strategic importance by senior managers and in need of change when discussing strategic weakness of the HRF.

When handing disciplinary issues, in the past 'HR' has been very late in delivering the decision. If you want to sack the person as soon as possible. Don't drag the person for 2 years and then sack. No use for anybody. That kind of hard-line thinking should be there (NHR-SM01).

The HR practitioner responsible for discipline, however, demonstrated a position of limited agency to effect change and failed to recognise that this was on the radar of an influential senior manager who saw the current discipline structure as disabling their BU's performance. For instance, when I was discussing the reasons for the HR practitioner not accessing strategic documentation, this HR practitioner responded with a suggestion for improving the process of discipline. This response was made in the context of this change recommendation contributing to strategic development.

Enquiry then shifted to understanding the mechanism they felt available to them to address such an issue. Avenues of change were unknown, as the processes they worked from did not have a continuous improvement control mechanism attached. When asked about interactions this practitioner had with actors outside the HRF, the response was "[no], I don't know any of these persons". Rather, the direction of reference they used was to look towards the

bottom, which was seen as more valuable from this practitioner's perspective.

When I asked where interactions occurred, their response was "[w]ith staff members. We can then see what their problems are, so more interactions are gotten on the ground".

In this case, policy and process defined the HR practitioner's role tightly, while they sought sensemaking cues from staff for improvements, and not senior managers. Despite this department within the HRF being the central location for discipline, and there being very clear committee structures for discipline, this HR practitioner's middle management agency towards change was also directed towards strategic value of change 'now' versus the 'future'. Their enactment of praxis was towards individual instances of discipline rather than a policy change where the impact of such issues would presumably be more broad sweeping and impactful over time. The identity of change therefore was downward looking praxis toward the line. Here, the HR practitioner also felt constrained by policy as much as those they interacted with from the line.

These findings show the emergence of HR practitioners making sense around being a change agent from downward sources (line management and employees), from where they were more socially embedded, and with limited strategically aligned activity occurring to address behavioural changes. This is despite the greatest amount of HR activity in terms of frequency and time being directed to this department. HR practitioner activity around change was directed towards trust with employees, and emotive activities more aligned to employee championing. Training and KPI systems were two places in which a

change agent role around behaviour and performance alignment might have occurred, yet there appears to be limited agency by HR practitioners directed towards using these avenues. The emergence of these themes carries over into the next section addressing the change agent role of HR practitioners.

5.4.5 Changes to policies and practices

With the advancement of HRM into the inclusion of HR policies and practices, Caldwell (2003) argues that it is of little surprise that the HR role of change agent has increasingly grown in significance. Liebowitz (2010) further argues that the HRF is likely the only organisational department that can reach and influence the behaviours of all levels of personnel by changing HRM systems. Should change be sought from organisational stakeholders, and the HRF looked to for such change, Tyson (1995) asserts that the HRF is presented with a vast opportunity to assume a central architect role within an organisation. Yet, my findings show that realising such opportunities in this changing role through policy and practice change is not straightforward.

This section addresses change agency associated with policy and practices, and the variations of these throughout PLSB. While there are certainly overlaps with the roles of administrative expertise, change agent here is not representative of operational effectiveness as a means to increase cost advantages (Ulrich, 1987). Rather, it characterises strategic alignment through impactful change.

5.4.5.1 Changes to 'mobility practices'

The largest categories to emerge from the data - also coded as strategic - were recruitment, promotion and transfer policies and practices. Of all the non-HR

senior manager interviews, these three HR practices were present in all transcript coding sources, with 174 total narratives incorporating these practices as of 'in need of strategic change'. These also featured heavily across other levels of analysis within PSLB.

A reference to one of these practices was often found to accompany another within the same narrative block, and were also wrapped in a rich plethora of BU context, internal practice and praxis, HRF interactions and situated micro-structures. These three practices have been collectively coded as mobility practices.

The HR policies relating to mobility practices within PSLB had until recently been largely one size fits all. Discrete, but critical policy changes had, however, recently been made, exempting *specialised* departments from having to hire within for any non-entry level positions, while also increasing the remuneration of employee segments that represented critical talent where extra-organisational pressures resulted in a highly competitive talent market. This policy change was directed mostly towards employee segments that constituted knowledge worker segments. However, exempted departments had to look for talent from within PSLB first before justifying the need for external hires. For some BUs, such flexibility offered considerable utility, while others were welcoming of the changes, yet still tended to hire within.

[The HRF] are adding value definitely. Earlier we have seen a lot of shortfalls, a lot of people have left the bank because of these transfer and promotional policies. We are a specialised area and we have lost of a lot of people. Promotions ... we have to have a separate scheme, most of the things have been corrected now though (NHR-SM11).

At the moment we don't recruit from outside. We have a policy where we first give the chance to the internal staff members, so at the moment we haven't found the need to recruit any externally. So, we take junior level and groom them up (NHR-SM06).

Importantly, these changes did not originate with the HRF themselves, but rather through the senior managers outside the HRF who determined that the division of employee segments was required. A senior manager notes:

At that time, they didn't get involved. It was myself, the CEO, and the CFO and then the board also wanted [these changes] (NHR-SM06).

This had two subtle consequences, in addition to the BUs affected by these changes being significantly enabled by not being held back by a standard HR policy across the bank. First, it greatly reduced the HRF's legitimacy as change agents by specialised units who were granted exemptions, as facilitation of desired outcomes had occurred outside of HRF involvement. Within specialised functions, this amplified existing beliefs that operational practices of some specialised units was beyond the comprehension of the HRF.

The second consequence pertains to avenues of senior management control practices. Here, resourcing collaborations did not exist between the HR Director and some specialised BUs, as they bypassed the HRF and went directly to the CEO to effect change. However, with enabling policy changes having occurred, the value of the HRF to specialist business units became administratively focused. Utility from the HRF then rested on timely support in the delivery of personnel to their units.

To conclude, specialist BUs who also held specialist identities (previously discussed in 4.4.2.3) had their unique issues dealt with outside the HRF

regarding policy change. Accordingly, they were further strategically enabled in their activities which relied heavily on talented skill. This however meant that they, in general, had found a pathway to address HR strategic issues through the CEO directly. Accordingly, there is the emergence of specialist units not seeking strategic integration with the HRF. Rather, assessments of utility result in the administrative role of facilitating the movement of people. Furthermore, this contrasts with other BUs that did not work under a specialist policy framework. Within a number of these units, there is diverse discourse surrounding addressing policies that are seen to disable their own activities. These are discussed below.

Changing mobility practice – an employee perspective

Outside of the senior manager level of analysis, change surrounding policy of promotions was a prominent category to also emerge from the employee level of analysis. Most tensions at this level of analysis were dependent on an employee's own personal situation of upward mobility. At this level, promotional elements dominated discourse surrounding the HRF. Even if their own personal situation was not affected by promotions they were empathetic towards a colleague's situation. One employee notes that:

There's no point. If they can't make a decision, the branch manager only takes the decision, why the hell do you have the HR (EMP-04)?

Policies regarding promotion had been impacted by the extra organisational occurrence of the GFC, and by regulatory frameworks as previously discussed in 4.4.1 and 4.4.2. The constraints of this had impacted overall perceptions of employee value towards the HRF as explained by one employee who narrates:

For about 5-6 years, the people did not get their positions. Their mentality was – why bother? Now we are coming out of it. For HR that is a major challenge. The lack of expansion in the past made them rusted. They were not willing. The staff were not willing. They don't see the HR [function] as useful (EMP-03).

Mobility practices, tensions and strategic change

Significant tensions surrounding mobility practices - both across and within BUs - were found within narratives, with such contention linked to the framing of the strategic versus operational contributions of the HRF. The interrelationship of the various components of mobility practices was found in part to stem from previous developmental logics (discussed in section 4.5.2.1) within PSLB. These logics had engrained an expectation of upward mobility through promotions, somewhat like a military structure. Here, one's promotion in rank is all but assured within the other ranks up to line roles, and to middle management within the officer corps.

One middle manager comments:

Promotions over the past 22 years, right at the beginning, the founder CEO at that time, if you're a good worker and identified as such, you are assured of your promotions and career (NHR-MM12).

Short of any glaring failures on an individual's part, keeping your head down and working hard previously entailed an expectation of movement – with employees also witnessing this regularly. One employee notes:

I don't know the reason, but when I joined this bank, back then we got promotions regularly. Now it's changed, we should apply and get promoted. [...] now it's difficult to get promoted (EMP-03).

At the policy level, such changes towards promotion were however seen to reflect promotional movement, and in turn organisational motivation. One senior manager presents a reflective narrative of those BUs that have been better enabled from backlogs in promotions that have occurred.

So, you asked what's changed in the last 1.5 years, as we cleared up the backlog [of promotions], people are now a lot happier, I have been recognised they see. How I see now is that in the next 3 years I have no such problems arising because everyone who needs to be promoted has been, just few more to go. But by and large one big issue has been put aside (NHR-SM10).

However strategic tension emerged with this being treated as an administrative process where some strongly sought the change agent role and the recognition that these were in fact highly critical strategic matters. While changes had occurred relating to HR mobility policies and practices, they were not seen as sufficiently attending to all levels. This senior manager provides a representative narrative of those who are still disabled by mobility practices.

If not, everyone has a time frame of 4 or 5 years and there's a transfer scheme that works here only at the lower level which again I don't like (NHR-SM05).

To conclude, there are instances of the HRF progressing backlogs of promotions, but there also remains tensions surrounding this not occurring fast enough. Previously illustrated were the external constraints placed on PSLB in general, and the HRF in particular, around being able to influence mobility practices. This in large part reduces the ability for HR practitioners to act strategically as a change agent around policy change.

Mobility practices – Implementation quality versus policy quality

The manner that the HRF acted within these processes was in some cases more of a concern than actual policies themselves. The praxis of engaging BUs with the “more proactive and interventionist role of the change agent” (Caldwell, 2003, p. 993) was sought and referenced regularly by units that felt, overall, that mobility practices disabled their actions. Where policy had not addressed the contextual concerns of BUs, they themselves embarked on, or proactively sought, a resolution.

Such references were linked to 'a disconnection' between the HRF understandings of what was strategically important to BU surrounding mobility practices themselves. While some units in this position were knowledge worker units, others could be considered regular banking units. Within BUs that considered themselves specialised, the importance of communication was central to understanding strategically important requirements.

[HR] need to understand that need very well. The discussion should happen on a proactive basis. There's no need to do a post-mortem to understand what went wrong, we don't have time for that (NHR-SM05).

It is very important, because if HR doesn't listen, we are a small department of 15 people but we contribute more than 50% to the bottom line and if they don't listen I think there's a big problem. But fortunately, it has changed now (NHR-SM06).

The representative narratives above indicate that the role of change agent is strongly associated with communication and with understanding the unique needs of BUs. The direction of communication was found to also be of significance. There were diverse assessments regarding who BUs preferred communication to be driven by.

In some cases, BUs felt this directionality of communication was a distinct disabler, while in other cases simply providing an organisational chart to let the HRF fill roles was sufficient communication.

Definitely, very often we have to contact them because we have put my staff on a career path. Of that I have to contact them, because their promotions and upgrades have to be determined not on the normal banking channels, because these people can be grabbed by our competitors if not (NHR-SM08).

They come to me on HR matters, whenever there are promotions and performance evaluations and any structural changes in the organisation, whenever they have an issue they come to me, because it affects their processes. But they are not coming to solve my problems (NHR-MM02).

We prepare our organisation chart which we send to them and in that we identify the expertise required for each unit (NHR-SM07).

The blurring of the change agent role and administrative role of HR can be seen to emerge within the dynamics illustrated above. While addressing change at the formal strategic planning level is presumably an area to address policy and practices, the change agent role in PSLB is also embedded in the day to day situated activities of HR administrative interactions.

5.4.6 Drivers of HR practitioner's orientation to change

Within the HRF itself, HR practitioners indicated within their narratives the importance of change agency related to mobility practices. Indeed, many had transferred to the HRF from within the bank to effect what they saw as meaningful change – as one HR practitioner notes:

Many of us came from within the bank, we have experienced HR from the other side and decided that we can help to make a change. That is the most important thing to me (HR-PR08).

Yet the role of change agent appeared to be a double-edged sword, as most HR practitioners confined change to their own experiences, which largely surrounded mobility practices to the exclusion of other avenues of change. To address meaningful policy change towards mobility practices, one HR practitioner reports that they drew from outside the organisation.

When they told us to change policies, then we went into the industry and we check the norms in the industry and we took points from them. And then we spoke to the line management and got their suggestions and proposals for these changes, then added everything together and presented again, got their concurrence, spoke to the unions, got their suggestions, and put all together and then advised the staff. All those things happened in 2011 and 2012 (HR-PR09).

Of consequence here is the direction of the internal references for change.

Except for a few HR practitioners, the HRF largely looked towards branch line

management. HR actors who looked towards the line most frequently were those that had come from the line.

Additionally, references to change were often framed as incremental in nature, like the administrative expert role where “we always try to improve the process” (HR-PR09). The HRF was tasked with proposing changes, yet the approval of change was required at the board level regarding policy change. They then respond to the question about approval being required before beginning a proposed policy change.

No, we don't. But the head of HR and the CEO will recommend all of the things, where the CEO being part of the board of directors, he will put it through and get approval (HR-PR09).

5.4.6.1 How do HR practitioners conceive change?

While it is also possible that HR practitioners were drawn to mobility practices as a mechanism for change because of strategic priority, this appears largely not to be the case. There is an orientation from HR practitioners who came from within the bank to frame change and their HR role through their own previous experiences.

We had [a colleague] who was here, he was also from another bank, he was here for a short time and he too bought in a lot of change. He was also bought in with this management change in 2009 and 2010. When you are a HR person, then you bring a lot of HR ideas a lot. We are from the line and we are branch banking but anybody coming to HR from outside who will see things from outside, not that we have come and made a change. That [colleague] coming from outside whom had a lot of experience and exposure in HR made a difference (HR-PR09).

They are not very HR oriented, technically competent guys. Most of these guys are bankers although they are sitting in HR. And most of these guys are coming from branches and also you don't have to have a technical expertise to do what they are doing. As long as you can understand the customer service aspect of it and do it. I would say a very average competence level. We don't see people in the HR department interested to find out what best practices are, what the industry is, how they do it, and if there's anything on the internet to download it and see if we can do away with something and adopt a best practice. Outside box thinking, that's very average I would say (HR-PR05).

To conclude my overall findings around the HR practitioner roles of change agent, and how strategic they are in this role, I have illustrated a complex web of inter-connections that orientated the HR Director and HR practitioner towards the enactment of change. My findings also demonstrate that the expectations of change vary significantly across PSLB, as do the praxis and interpretive frameworks from which the role of change agent draws upon. The HR Director was found to be highly change orientated, and this evoked largely positive perceptions across PSLB. Yet, his praxis varied in the section that discussed the idiosyncratic variation between praxis. Additionally, HR practitioners themselves acted out change agent roles, often drawing upon the situated contexts they were embedded within. As interpretive frameworks that articulated PSLB strategic orientation and specific initiatives were not largely available to HR practitioners, their strong desire to enact change looked downwards (branch line management and employees). This had the effect of HR practitioners often not attending to elements of change sought by some business units. Accordingly, the strategic utility of the overall HRF diminished.

5.5 Employee Champion Role

The role of Employee Champion originated by Ulrich (1997) entails “listening and responding to employees” (Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005, p. 50). This section reports my findings around HR practitioners in their role of employee champion by linking this role to strategically relevant issues of BU personnel.

5.5.1 Role tensions stemming from performative and developmental logics

As discussed in Chapter 4 (4.5.2), the performance logics introduced by PSLB post-GFC created tensions within an established cadre of PSLB personnel who largely held long tenures. Indeed, in most of cases, PSLB personnel had only known this one employer. Similar to the broader banking contextual factors discussed by Hailey et al. (2005) in their research, PSLB staff had also joined the bank for high levels of job security, career progression and the prestige and status that banking as a profession offered personnel.

One HR practitioner refers to the nature of the profession regarding staff morale.

Yes. It's a white-collar job. You can go for a good house, vehicle, these things are there. So, people like to work in a bank (HR-PR04).

The HRF faced role tensions through contending with an embedded legacy of employee developmental logics – something that they had themselves largely progressed through - as well as a newer generation of personnel who were trained within the newer performance logics on their induction training. This latter category of employee also increasingly sought an avenue for their ideas to be heard and had higher expectations of their value to an organisation. One HR practitioner refers to differences in mobility mind set, with this newer generation's likelihood to move to another organisation.

They go in search of a different place where their ideas are recognized (HR-PR06).

HR practitioners' positions towards being an employee champion were immersed in trade-offs between the role of employee champion and performance elements. These performance elements were the new dominant

logic embedded with the strategies of the bank. Overtly, however, HR practitioners seemed very comfortable with conflicting tensions.

You can't meet everybody's expectations. But you have to strike a balance between what is best for the organisation, what are the deliveries of the organisations and at the same time strike a balance with what is expected by the employees also. In doing so, you might get people who are disappointed on certain things, but then again, it's natural in this environment (HR-PR02).

More subtly however, embracing such performance based logics that embedded themselves within the strategies of the organisation were influenced by their own previous role experiences. This pertained to HR practitioners largely having been general bankers for significant amounts of time before joining the HRF. For example, while the HR Director developed and implemented behavioural training programs that worked on removing a 'family culture' (discussed in 5.5.2) and replacing it with a team culture that valued people, HR practitioners' identities still embraced a family culture. They rationalised these against the performance logics of them being strategic.

[With a family culture] extended family can bring business to the bank. Those ties are there. That family feeling makes you closer to your customer and then the business comes automatically. That is something strategic (HR-PR09).

'Family culture' and a culture that values people are certainly two forms of people orientation; however, as expressed by participants in PSLB, they differ. Family culture was framed around caring for customers and staff, but is seen in a negative light by some senior managers as it also entails the development logics where employees do not embrace performance. A family culture therefore was narrated as less efficient in the eyes of some senior managers, and a disabling force towards efficiency and change. A culture that 'values people' moves away from development logics (discussed in chapter 4) and focuses on customer service to improve performance and competitive

advantage. Framing of this entails a strong linkage to efficiency and employee flexibility.

Accordingly, tensions are also found that build upon the identity tensions already discussed, and to a degree place the HR Director and HR practitioners at odds of organisational intent around family culture versus people orientated culture.

5.5.2 Employee champion mechanisms

The HRF dealt with the employee championing role through two mechanisms. The first were surveys that were distributed to personnel, and the second was a part of their daily interactions with employees. A dedicated role for grievance handling had remained unfilled for several years.

Senior managers [now] do grievance [in addition to] their role (HR-PR04).

This practitioner noted that the new director of HR “thought it won’t work, and said we need a separate person for this, so now we are looking for a suitable person”.

5.5.2.1 Employee surveys

The survey mechanisms devoted to employee motivation were dispensed annually. Leading into the current strategic plan, an external consultancy firm had also administered a survey across the bank as a part of the strategic planning process. Consequently, a 15% salary increase was given across the entire bank over and above collective agreement pay increment raises.

The regular annual survey was dispensed through the HRF across the bank. A line manager notes “[employees] always have a fear thinking it will go against

them. It's not an anonymous survey" (NHR-LM01). This line manager also indicated outside of the survey they felt that there were few mechanisms to address employee concerns. They note: "no they haven't [any avenue], I think it is important however".

Interpretation of survey results

The interpretations of survey results were also seen by some line managers to inhibit them from speaking up against the HRF, despite HR being a cause of poor survey outcomes.

[...] we never blame HR, and the management always blames us, not the HR (NHR-MM11).

However, while some variations were found between different line managers regarding how well the HRF understood their needs, and the needs of their staff to champion their employees, broadly HR practitioners were found to understand elements of importance and the needs of branches.

5.5.2.2 Employee champion daily praxis

The most employed mechanism to address the employee champion role fell within the second avenue, which was through day-to-day interactions – the praxis of daily interactions within HR practitioners' roles. Here there was no official structure or mechanism for HR practitioners to address or pass on employee concerns, but rather a desire to do the best they could to champion employees. However, variations emerged of who sought to treat the HRF as an employee champion, who went elsewhere, and which HR practitioners were approached. One HR practitioner who came from outside of the bank several years earlier notes:

For certain issues they come to HR, for their staff issues and some come for their own promotional stuff when they are frustrated they come to talk to us. Operationally wise, HR is not very involved because this is a commercial bank. They go on to [the senior manager] responsible for the branch network for such matters, rather than coming here, because he is who is in charge (HR-PR07).

Those HR practitioners who came to the HRF from the branch network provided narratives counter to the quote above, framing high levels of engagement in the employee champion role. One HR practitioner who narrated a strong identity aligned to employee champion, and a high frequency of engaging in this role, responded to my inquiry by saying it was useful having spent most of their career within a branch and having previously been a branch manager. They note:

Very much, because the problems we have over there will be easy to understand their problems. Because HR sees things differently from the other side. But when a branch person comes here, we will understand it better and how it should be developed (HR-PR09).

This HR practitioner goes on to say: “everybody’s problems are coming here and we have to find solutions. Day-to-day, everything happens”. Similar accounts from the branches are noted by three other HR practitioners with the same background.

We came to the HR department, that’s the difference. That’s a major difference. We came from branches and we saw what’s happening in the other end. We came here, we wanted to help the people who were there who needs assistance, so we have seen the branch side and we try to accommodate and cater to the requirements of the line management. Because we were bought in from the line management and that is the major difference really (HR-PR03).

HR practitioners who had experienced long tenures within the bank, but not within the branches, presented narratives that showed strong identities associated with employee champion, yet less activity surrounding this role. While those with strong banker identities and employee champion identities mostly believed that senior managers and their own director were skilled and

had the wellbeing of employee interests in mind when making strategic decisions, they presented narratives that their unique position afforded access to insights that could not be achieved by senior managers.

But a director may have a good business acumen and understand things; however, the director may not know the interaction is between the line and the HR, so how were they aware of this problem (HR-PR09)?

5.5.2.1 Employee champion sources of intelligence

Within the narratives of the above HR practitioner, intelligence gathering mechanisms included an ‘an open-door culture’.

When we go for branch visits, or when we meet people at functions or at the lunch room we get feedback (HR-PR03).

The HRF was located within a large corporate campus that included all personnel not situated within the branch network. While the proximity of the HRF afforded easy access to all non-branch personnel, these non-branch narratives varied in their assessment of those of the HRF.

The HRF narrative was one of the high levels of communication for non-branch personnel.

The approach we have with other staff is different, anyway we see if they are happy. Only if they are, the output is generated. We communicate a lot, we have their personal numbers, and we talk to them often (HR-PR09).

While the depicted enactment of employee championing was narrated as high by HR practitioners, non-branch narratives were largely found to be counter to this. Assessments of middle managers who in these units had interactions with HR felt that their concerns were not being addressed.

It's very bad, it's not how it should be. Maybe my department has been treated like a secondary department, because it's a support service department and it's not a main core business function of the company. So, they have less priority to solve my problems. We are little disappointed about that approach (NHR-MM01).

Outside branches, only two BU middle managers had highly favourable assessments of the HRF as employee champions. These assessments were also found to be favourable for change agent and administrative expert, with the assessments by the BU senior manager also aligning to these. Generally, however, outside the branch network, the two roles of change agent and employee champion were not neatly separated, but were instead tightly interwoven, where the ability for the HRF to not meet a role expectation within one category was narrated as a failure to deliver within other roles as well.

5.5.3 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was an area keenly pursued by the HR Director, alongside another senior manager with whom he worked closely. The HR Director notes the strategic value of this as it was one of the HRF's four strategic pillars.

We have to increase the number of employment engagement activities. Today maybe some sort of entertainment activities, sport activities, talent exhibition, annual get together, carols, 'bakthi gee' or a Christmas party. We have to add more engagement activities where employees will feel that it's part of their journey, this bank. If not, they think we come to office to get our salaries and stay home, there's no life. I have got into these areas to increase employee engagement activities. I am the president of sports club, donation scheme, and welfare association. All these things, I have realized the important element of these when you are driving for a cultural transformation (HR-SM).

While the focus on employee engagement was driven by the HR Director, other HR practitioners were not involved in this. There appeared to be little communication or awareness within the HRF of this even being a strategic

pillar. Rather, the HR director looked to the head of another BU, who shared the same beliefs on the importance of behavioural change. Working together these two senior managers sought to address strategic change by implementing an array of behavioural changes. The championing of employees was used to demonstrate meaningful change. NHR-SM-02 articulates the importance.

We have a strategic plan in action for 4 years, we have a road map for the bank, for the bank to get there, and the people like to take us there. Its cliché, everybody says basically our people are biggest assets and all, but it's all just bull because people don't mean it (NHR-SM).

As a means of demonstrating this, both HR-SM and NHR-SM02 championed and participated in employee engagements themselves to demonstrate commitment, as well as gain feedback from across PSLB. In both narratives, these two senior managers articulate valuable encounters with union representatives on engagement committees, social interactions and sports teams, as well as a diverse group of personnel.

NHR-SM02 further worked with the director of HR to advise on the importance of other small, but strategically important perks to facilitate closer engagements aligned to their broader behavioural changes within the bank.

The lunch and tea are benefits given by the bank, right? If we don't give that properly, Sri Lankans are very nutty, if we don't give them a proper tea everyone is mad (NHR-SM02).

HRF saw itself to strongly align to the employee champion role. The formal frameworks for this role were however structurally weak with little actual praxis found to address findings of annual employee surveys, while the accuracy of such surveys was questionable due to trust and employees not being anonymous in such surveys.

As such, the secondary mechanism of HR practitioners receiving feedback from employees to address concerns was the dominant means to engagement in champion employees. Overall, HR practitioners presented an essentially strong identity towards an orientation to assist and help employees. Variations however were found where HR practitioners with branch experience interacted with branch personnel. These participants narrated frequent and meaningful engagements, while those without branch experience reported much less meaningful interactions and support.

Additionally, while HR practitioners felt they were open and effective at addressing non-branch concerns, proximity to personnel located in the corporate offices did not manifest in substantive praxis. Those from outside the branch network did not believe that the HRF were open to their concerns. Furthermore, HR practitioners were not a part of employee engagement activities. In addressing how strategic HR practitioners are in respect to the role of employee champion, HR practitioners focused on activity towards the line of bank branches, yet distanced themselves from central campus functions.

5.6 Administrative Expert Role

Ulrich's (1997) role of administrative expert or functional expert (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) addresses the efficient execution of HR practices to the ends of achieving operational effectiveness. This constitutes lower cost structures, and in turn, a means of competitive advantage (Ulrich, 1987). However, in contrast to Storey's (1992) *handmaiden* role, this also requires value addition by HR practitioners – e.g. through interventions and policies

(Lemmergaard, 2009). This section looks at the HRF's administrative expert role within PSLB.

5.6.1 Value addition

Within PSLB, the role of administrative expert that incorporated value addition was clearly present. The HRF largely did not feel disempowered in the face of new market imperatives (Caldwell, 2003), although notions of where their empowerment should be directed, and in which situations to assert agency are central themes of this thesis's overall findings.

HR practitioner narratives all strongly aligned to the notion of value addition by the HRF in facilitating central HR practices in human capital movement and capabilities alignment, and many reconciled such a role as a critical strategic contribution to PSLB. The desire and willingness to deliver value within this role is a strong element of the HR practitioner identity construct. Representative of the HRF position towards service value addition, one HR practitioner remarks:

As far as I think, we shouldn't be isolated, we should be with the business. We can't think only from the HR point [of view], but from the business point [of view]. Our action should support the business, not harm it (HR-PR03).

HR practitioners had come to the HRF largely with the intent of improving it or offering value to HR partners. They themselves overtly reconciled the need to provide value addition to other BUs with whom they partner.

5.6.2 Devolution of HRF responsibilities

The devolution of some HRM responsibilities to the line was also seen as proper and fitting by all HR practitioners. This is because they drew on

experiences where their agency in their previous roles as branch line managers was inhibited by a very powerful HRF that was seen as largely unresponsive to their needs. Ulrich's assumption that enduring tension can be removed within the administrative expert role with a shift from 'power' to 'service delivery' was therefore found to be an underlying position that HR practitioners strongly agreed with. This largely entailed the employee champion role being balanced with the performance needs of the bank.

Before devolution of responsibilities, the power structure of the HRF was such that policy and practices inhibited the timely movement of people. One representative quote of the power of the previous administrative influence of the HRF is articulated by a senior manager.

Before it was more or less where you wait and see, it was not proactive. Because of that we lost staff. Now of course, I see something different (NHR-SM06).

The overall credit for this was largely given to the HR Director entering PSLB. Asking if differences were observed in power structures between the previous HR system and the newer reformed structure, one senior manager replied:

Yes, definitely. He has got the other departmental heads involved with him. And final responsibility he takes. Earlier we had a situation where there was a little reluctance to take responsibility. But with him, he consults everyone and finally a reasonable decision is taken (NHR-SM12).

Such reluctance to be involved was seen by PSLB personnel as the HRF previously having too much power.

When I joined the bank of course it had a real power behind HR. Now it's not the case (Emp-01).

5.6.3 Administrative expert role within the branch network

The BU that housed the branch network was the largest unit by a considerable margin. Accordingly, the observed frequency of the HRF's day-to-day work attending to this unit was also unsurprisingly high. The extra-organisational regulatory dynamic which required that personnel did not exceed a tenure of more than four years within any one position or branch, further exacerbated the frequent mobility and training practices directed towards this BU. So too did the market dynamics of a competitive labour market, with attrition of account managers necessitating replacement.

5.6.3.1 Line management

Branch line managers' dependency on the HRF had not changed despite line managers attending to their staff across many of the performance related elements, as well as direct HRM functional tasks.

We all have an element of HR in our day to day work. The staff who report to us - we have to look into their attendance, leave etc. (NHR-LM04).

One branch line manager further notes:

Actually, we are still totally dependent on HR. They do the recruitment, the total process (NHR-LM04).

Another outlines the administrative interaction branch line managers have with the HRF.

If we have a problem, we have to inform the HR. If we are short of staff, if we get more clients towards international trade, and if the staff members are not very familiar, then we inform the HR and try to get a suitable replacement (NHR-LM01).

Engagement through picking up the phone to solve a branch manager's problem was central to this administrative expert role, and in many respects

merges with the employee champion role of solving problems. Such an approach was on an as-needed basis, as this line manager further articulates.

We don't speak to HR much unless there's a need, and mostly the need would be with regard to transfers or if there's someone who has resigned and we need a new staff member (NHR-LM02).

Assessments of this approach were largely articulated as positive by line managers.

Even when I had an issue with a staff member, I brought it to their attention and they looked into it (HR-LM04).

This manner of interaction was seen as productive by line managers, even in cases where the branch line manager had no personal relationship with anyone from the HRF. The agency of the branch line managers to be assertive in their instigated communication of HRM needs was accordingly high.

They don't know me personally, they just know me as a person with KPIs and a fighter. I always fight with HR to get the staff things done and get the right kind of people. Sometimes I am a nuisance to [the director of HR]. I tell HR if they don't do it, I'll go to the next person. That is the productive way, not in the means of insulting anyone (NHR-LM05).

5.6.3.2 Middle Managers

Moving up the line, a greater imperative for adding value more systematically emerges. A middle manager who is responsible for the branch network within a region discusses the value of an administrative expert changing to include orientation towards value being delivered through continuous improvement.

Here the middle manager who was responsible for an entire region of branches notes:

Now I know my next three years where I should be. I should downsize my staff and overheads, but even if I do so I must improve their skills. That is what I will discuss with HR. So, HR should be involved in continuous improvements of my staff, including me. They should have a

continuous discussion on training and specially finding some kind of criteria to discuss the performance of my staff (NHR-MM01).

The pressures of the KPI performance metrics compound at this level. Here role expectations of administrative experts move. They do so by moving from addressing performance alignments of branch KPIs (and being attentive to the requests and judgments of branch managers) towards aligning with performance measures.

My head of operation gives me my KPI's, HR at the end of the year asks what were the KPI's given to you and what is your performance level and your staff performance level and I forward that document to them so they can evaluate it. There's no integration between my department and HR on performance grounds (NHR-MM02).

Another middle manager running a different cluster of branches articulated the same sentiment regarding integration. Overtly, they note that the HRF only interacts at their level when there is discontent within the branches. The subtle implication is that the HRF has a strong orientation towards the role of employee champion. The frequency of dealing with branch manager issues had the result of hindering proactive engagement above the line management. Such role expectations take on a different framing of strategic value.

5.6.3.3 Senior Manager

At the next level this issue compounds even further. The senior manager of the BU responsible for the branches is equally concerned with the policies and documented practices of HRM, as he is with the focus and attentiveness towards their own situated context. This encompassed a considerable number of variables given the bank was seeking to expand the branch network by over 100 additional branches in the coming five years. At this level, there significant strategic expectation associated with the administrative expert role.

I am looking for a lean operation. I don't want too many people doing manual work (NHR-SM01).

Yet this senior manager looked to the HRF to utilise their administrative expertise to guide them in their role through anticipating the needs of this unit.

Before they put their strategy to place, they have to see what the bank's strategy is. Then get ready for that. If I say I want to have 25 branches this year, they have to take that point (NHR-SM01).

Competency alignments in the branch network

Concerns also existed towards broad competency alignments. The senior manager notes:

It's not a head to head situation. Example - a branch needs an officer. You cannot transfer any officer on the system and fill that vacancy. HR should have the ability to pick the ideal guy, it cannot be just a head to make the replacement (NHR-SM01).

While at the line level of the branches actors asserted agency to get their required cadre of staff, at the senior management level, the concern was in planning and documenting formal mechanisms of the administrative expert to offer value. This was something that he was not seeing emerge. He further notes. "I don't even know if bank has a strategy for HR".

To conclude, strategically relevant issues are framed differently at different levels of analysis around the role of administrative expert. There is however a theme of the HRF being able to address line managers in a manner that enables the achievement of their strategic priorities. Yet, moving upwards within the organisation, there is greater disconnection between the way HR practitioners deliver value, and the value sought by BUs. Performance is tightly interwoven into KPI structures, with each level requiring differing praxis and practices to facilitate their performance.

5.7 Summary of chapter 5

This chapter has focused on the role variations of the HRF between different BUs within the same organisation. The contextual variations within a single organisation are often discussed as being important to understand, but seldom empirically investigated. In cases where they have been examined, the focus has tended to be on a selected level of analysis. While such insights have been valuable, they have shown only a part of the contextual picture. Equally so, extant literature to date has also sought role and strategic variation across multiple organisations, omitting variations between BUs in the same firm.

With legitimacy being so heavily engrained in HRM strategic discourse, strategic enquiry has tended to draw deeply upon role expectations of those outside the HRF to understand the strategic activity, roles and contributions of HR practitioners. These have often been balanced with matched pairings of HR directors, who are appropriately framed to be shown to fit within a range of formal structures that afford degrees of strategic power and influence. Indeed, the evaluations of the HRF by senior managers and matched pair assessments of their HR director colleagues have been used successfully to illustrate broad role alignments and misalignments of the HRF in academic research, such as that undertaken, for example, by Guest and King (2004).

Such research has used these alignments/misalignments to show the HRF's strategic role within an organisation with considerable success. Yet, with scholarship drawing on a role definition similar to it being the sum of expectations directed at an actor within a social structure (Katz & Kahn, 1968), this inherently places strategy within narrower frames of reference such

as formal structures. It has not accounted for various HR actors carrying out varied praxis with different BUs, nor has it captured clear differences illustrated in this chapter between members of the HRF themselves.

In my case study, for example, the HR Director and HR practitioners illustrate distinctly different role characteristics. Equally so, different BUs exemplified variations around their strategic concerns, with some being enabled by HRF practices and praxis, and others being disabled. The complexity of contextually bound generalised characteristics and localised idiosyncrasies (Jarzabkowski, 2004) is illuminating, in that it demonstrates that actor identity structures, situated context, and structural configurations of organisational systems all contribute towards how strategic activity is conceived and acted upon.

In many respects, scholarship to date has dealt in dichotomies of strategic and functional groupings when dealing with HR practices themselves. The grouping of HR practices has occurred with little regard to how praxis unfolds surrounding such practices. These findings illustrated that the way praxis occurs can influence and change the dynamics and composition of an HR practice, if it is to be treated as a variable.

When deeper attention is directed towards how HR practices are carried out, including contextual dynamics surrounding HR practices, my findings illuminate pathways towards which functional HR activities may also enable or disable strategic outcomes. Indeed, as this chapter has shown, elements across all roles discussed were framed in a strategic manner, either from HRF practitioners or from organisational actors.

In relation to my research question “*how strategic are HR practitioners in the development & implementation of practices across different business units*”, the interpretations of being strategic are particularly important. I found that despite the HR Director being included in high level strategic integration, amongst some BUs there is a need for HR practitioners to independently interpret strategically relevant issues from BUs, and exhibit agency towards change and support.

Particularly, there is a need for HR practitioners to be able to access higher level strategic references to make sense of organisational priorities. An absence of such references leads HR practitioners to draw upon situated contexts they are embedded within. This has relevance to the literature surrounding strategic ambiguity. While ambiguity has been reported to “stimulate creative ideas and generate more collaborative relationships” (Abdallah & Langley, 2014, p. 238), the contextual differences found in PSLB needed to be understood by HR practitioners. Varying BUs, divergent BUs' strategic priorities, and hierarchal structures all inhibited the HRF's ability to provide additional value to its partners. Such complexity adds to the need for HR practitioners to be embedded in organisational settings where they understand strategically relevant phenomena occurring within each business unit.

Accordingly, the complexity of a large organisation – as in the case of PSLB - does not seem to allow for the makings of a strategically aligned HRF if the HR Director is solely moving the HR chess pieces on the board – no matter the director's disposition towards change and the strategic access they are

afforded. There is evidence to suggest the need for greater inter-team coordination activities (Ambrosini et al., 2007) on the HRF's part, to better enable 'being' more strategic. There is little evidence found within my findings of contextually bound sensemaking activities (stemming from different situations) being discussed with colleagues outside their immediate teams. Doing so may have enabled the HRF to make better collective sense of PSLB's complex puzzle. In this respect, an opportunity to achieve process advantage is arguably missed by the HRF.

CHAPTER 6 - BU AND HRF INTEGRATION

6.1 Introduction

Within this chapter I report the varying levels of strategic integration occurring between different BUs and the HR practitioners. I present how partnership relationships occurred, as well as the factors found to underpin HRF-BU integration. In doing so I illustrate both between unit (i.e. Unit A - HRF and Unit B-HRF) and within-unit variation (i.e. senior manager, middle manager etc.) practices and praxis. Accordingly, I address research questions *2a* and *2b*:

2a: How does strategic integration occur between HR practitioners and business units?

2b: What factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business units?

6.2 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins by framing interaction and collaboration within HR-BU business partner linkages. In section 6.3, I attend to research question *2a* by reporting how interactions and collaborations occurred between the HRF and BUs. I illustrate the clusters of interaction occurring between the HRF and BUs and illustrate the directionality of activity within the partnerships to demonstrate both proactive and reactive interaction. I also show that proactive and reactive orientations differ among BUs, as well as between strategic and operational practices. In Section 6.4, I examine the variations of collaborations between the HRF and BUs. I report how collaborations occur across strategic

practices that are categorised into strategy formation practices (6.5), organising practices (6.6), and control practices (6.7). In Section 6.8, I report what factors influence interactions between HR-BU interactions. Finally, section 6.9 provides a summary of my chapter's overall findings.

6.3 Interaction and collaboration between the HRF and BUs

6.3.1 Framing integration

Within HRM scholarship, the 'business partner role' (Caldwell, 2008) provides a structure for HR-BU integration to occur - where the HRF can in turn add value to strategic decisions (Welch & Welch, 2012). Integration and collaboration have both been used to understand HR-BU integration (Sarvaiya, 2014). Observing the interactions that the HRF has with BU management can capture phenomena surrounding integration (e.g. Moenaert, Souder, De Meyer, & Deschoolmeester, 1994; Ruekert & Walker Jr, 1987); while observing collaborations (e.g. Lawrence & Lorsch, 1986; Schrage, 1990) can also do the same. Using both collaboration and interaction (Kahn, 2001) therefore presents itself as a robust means to observe HRF-BU integration within PSLB.

Strong strategic partnerships have been argued to be inclusive of strategic integration linkages that are operationally proactive and strategically reactive (Brockbank, 1999; Welch & Welch, 2012). Accordingly, I start this section by showing variations of BU-HRF proactive and reactive interactions from the interview data, with the associated assessments of such interactions also illustrated.

6.3.2 Proactivity versus accommodating SBU needs

When analysing HRF–BU interactions, narratives surrounding initiation of interaction emerged as participants explained strategic and operational activities. The framing of who instigates interaction was frequently used to articulate the strength of the HR partnership role within PSLB. My interview data revealed that preferred initiation of activities by BUs from the HRF varied, as did the way the HRF instigated activity and engaged with BUs.

The data also revealed the importance and impact of ‘who’ instigated activity. Some BUs had a strong desire for proactive participation, while in other instances, BUs purely sought reactive relationships. This is interesting, as strategic roles (painted by Storey, Ulrich and Caldwell) often promote proactivity (Welch & Welch, 2012). Brockbank (1999) however contends that the positive undertones accompanying the word ‘proactive’ can invariably reduce the importance of ‘reactive’ relationships that too can constitute strategic value (Welch & Welch, 2012).

6.3.3 Adaptive and recursive practices

The historical role that the HRF has performed within an organisation and the priorities of new role expectations may result in the emergence of tension (Glover & Butler, 2012). At PSLB, this position appeared frequently within interview narratives.

6.3.4 Strategic proactivity sought but not occurring

The first grouping of senior managers sought strategically pro-active engagement from the HRF that they perceived was not occurring, although the way they did this varied. In one case, the strategic interaction the senior

manager wanted from the HRF was proactivity around extensive value adding analysis. They narrated that this would enable their BU by the HRF delivering value around integrative solutions.

The second senior manager however, was more confined in their scope when articulating what proactive strategic interactions entailed. Their narrative focused more on the HRF proactively seeking to better understand the work undertaken within the BU. The first narrative below illustrates how proactivity was framed around planning and high levels of integrations between the HRF and the BU, while the second illustrates the position of the senior manager who framed proactivity around understanding what their BU does.

First, they have to understand what the banking strategy is. First the big picture. Then they have to see each of us as the pieces of this puzzle. What do I do to make the puzzle right? That part is not happening. There is no communication between HR and the rest of the bank (NHR-SM01).

[...] then it will be an independent thing rather than me asking for my requirements. And if they know on their own what we need for the profile of a staff member, they might be able to find the best profile, and find the best person, rather than me saying this is who I am looking for, in all (BU-H NHR-SM04).

Two vignettes now illustrate the contextual issues found within these BUs.

These are provided to explain recursive and adaptive practice dynamics.

6.3.4.1 Strategic proactivity sought but not occurring – Vignette 1

This senior manager sought the development of a strategic framework with the end goal of the HRF understanding the “puzzle”, rather than directing the HRF towards what it should be doing. Strategy is framed here explicitly, where some form of a documented approach is provided by the HRF - after undertaking systematic analysis and deliberation. This includes not only the

analysis of broader organisational dynamics, but the BU's own specific external and internal contexts.

The requirement for communication was central to this position, as it offered a means for sensemaking to occur for both parties. Therefore, this BU senior manager valued communication, not only as a better means for the articulation of requirements (sensegiving), but also as a better means of receiving advice and solutions appropriate to their context, or a better means to understand the HR's ability to support outcomes (sensemaking). Furthermore, proactive engagement to instigate communication on the part of the HR function was highly desirable, yet was not being achieved.

For this manager, the frequency of interaction with the HR function was reported to be significant, yet the alignment of proactive activities related to strategic action were seen to be significantly misaligned. Rather, the attributes of interaction were operationally reactive.

So, it happens on a daily basis. In a week, definitely three days. Those are all, operational task related - not strategic. No one from HR has approached me and said how our HR policies and strategies have to align with the business environment (BU-A NHR-SM01).

Of interest in this narrative is the indication that strategic interactions with the HRF should not be confined to the domain of the HR Director alone, but also include the aggregate HRF. There are strong indications of this senior manager having regular contact with multiple HR personnel, yet engagements are confined to operational *ways of doing*.

NHR-SM01 was a unit head who had a wide range of responsibilities and who came from outside of the bank just under three years before the collection of

my data. Their responsibilities included the running of the branch network, with significant credit and financial product oversight. Their tasks had expanded quickly to include an array of responsibilities under the leaner senior management structure. As a result of the broad and dynamic complexity of their role, fluidity and reflexivity superseded stability (Jarzabkowski, 2004). This senior manager sought adaptive expertise from the HRF in a manager that had previously not occurred.

In their narrative, the senior manager sought proactive activity on the HRF's part that required the HRF to adapt their praxis. NHR-SM01 needed the HRF to acquire a more suitable dynamic understanding of PSLB's strategy. This would then enable this particular BU. This participant further notes:

What type of people are needed, where will it be opened, the economic drivers. They start looking for the people. If we don't have them internally, look for them outside and start recruiting people. That part is not happening yet. We are just coming out of certain regime. That's what they should be doing.

For this unit head, reference to 'just coming out of a certain regime' was found to be indicative of a belief that the HR function draws heavily on recursive practices of the past that are no longer of value - in their perception damaging the bank. The senior manager draws from their own experiences outside of PSLB to contrast tangible strategic differences. They articulate background by saying:

I come from a bank that was considered as the 'best team in the country' - best bank kind of thing.

The senior manager drew on these experiences to legitimise practices that the HRF were not doing within PSLB, as well as to highlight institutional logic differences.

My previous bank, they knew how to measure the knowledge gap.

NHR-SM01 frames losses within their unit as result of the embedded developmental logics of the ‘family culture’ they were battling at PSLB.

When I started receiving those losses, they started to be more professional and careful with what they do. Otherwise you are short a 100,000 and the bank loses a million and you go recover from the insurance.

New performance based logics were highly engrained within this individual, and they themselves were a central architect in recent structural changes that sought to further reduce silos within PSLB. They reported to work with high levels of daily ambiguity in their role. This entailed regular referencing of strategic target documents, which played a central role in determining this BU’s strategic direction. This participant’s performance logic meant that they often sought to undo recursive practices of the past within their own role and focus on the creation of context specific adaptive practices as a way forward. This senior manager saw themselves as a central organisational change agent.

It’s not clearly centrally target driven- me coming here was also to take the bank out of that culture. All working together on a common objective kind of thing.

This vignette illustrates the dynamics of this BU, and how individual senior manager traits in conjunction with the BU’s operating environment resulted in notions of strategic integration being defined. Their sought state of integrations is represented by Golden and Ramanujam’s (1985) integrative linkage. Despite relatively high frequencies of interaction with HR personnel, this linkage was not occurring. The bankers’ own identity drew on external and legitimate ways of doing from outside previous experiences, themselves battling with institutionalised recursive practices of the past engrained in areas of PSLB.

6.3.4.2 Strategic proactivity sought but not occurring – Vignette 2

The second senior manager within this cluster - NHR-SM04 - also sought proactive strategic engagement, although the current framework of interaction with the HRF was not reported to be disabling his unit. They report their needs as strategic through the HRF proactively better understanding what they do. Yet, they also narrate that given their business dynamic, this was not possible within the current framework by noting:

It would be a big task for them I think to understand our business needs and all.

This is interesting, as the general tone of their narrative was not a sharp rebuke towards the HRF, but rather a matter of fact position that their BU could not be understood by the HRF, and this limited the value they could offer.

NHR-SM04 also did not explicitly state a means towards the HRF being strategically proactive, other than to better understand their business. Unlike NHR-SM01's narrative, the word strategic for NHR-SM04 was a vague notion unaccompanied by proactive examples. Indeed, their narrative leaned heavily towards what the literature would term operational.

NHR-SM04's current framework for interaction with the HRF was on a needs basis in which the HRF was perceived as operationally proactive for junior staff categories and operationally reactive for more senior management. Yet, there did not appear to be any tension portrayed in this interactive framework, as those found with NHR-SM01. This senior manager appreciated the more 'open' HRF, and this countered their previous experiences with the HR function. "HR, of course, now they are very cooperative, even if they want to

transfer somebody, they make sure we are happy with it”. This BU was content operating with HRM policies.

If there's a business requirement, it is HR that I get in touch. If I need a staff member [of a certain] profile, the bank's policy is to first internally advertise, if not you go out, likewise with HR I will tell them this is the position.

This senior manager also excluded the HRF in their discourse surrounding staff related matters that could be seen as more strategic in nature (competency alignment and motivational outcomes on performance). These were all narrated as being important, but NHR-SM04 did not reference the HRF within their discourse surrounding these. Rather, these were issues that they and their team dealt with themselves. Despite the narratives below including human capital elements, the HRF is not mentioned in the competency alignment, transferring or strategic and performance planning elements of their narratives.

It depends on each staff member. There are staff members who are very keen to work, and some who are just passengers. You can talk to them and tell them, but it's their nature. There are also some go getters. The challenge we have is making use of them at the right place.

It's not fair for me to pull a staff member to oversee my staff because this guy knows credit work and officers knowing credit are not that easily found.

Accordingly, interaction on the HRF's part is operationally depicted, with a combination of reactive and proactive elements that did not appear to be particularly strong. Value was derived from cooperation that entailed the HRF proactively contacting this senior manager to check that their instigated transfer would not disable the BU, and this BU contacting the HR function as needed.

This senior manager had been with PSLB since 1993 and had started in general banking before moving to their current role. Their role required significant coordination with other units, yet they worked within a narrower scope of responsibilities that were largely technical in nature. Counter to the first vignette, proactivity in the HRF is sought, yet their narrative reflects largely recursive ways of HR interaction.

To conclude, notions of strategic proactivity depart starkly from vignette 1. Despite wanting proactivity, the current relationship of one-way integration does not seem disable this senior manager's BU. Also interesting is that the direction of the one-way linkage changes according to the level of employee being dealt with. For junior staff, the HRF leads the one-way linkage, while it is operational reactivity when senior staff are being dealt with. Here the BU leads the one-way linkage.

6.3.5 Future strategic proactivity sought

This subsection discusses HRF-BU linkages in which BUs sought future orientated proactive relationships to better address their strategic issues. This category is formed based on participants' desire for HR proactive engagement at some future point in time, but latitude was afforded by BUs for this to evolve. In these cases, proactivity was valued, yet operationally reactive HR interactions were found. These narratives reflected an ideal state of strategic proactivity in the future, but are also contingent on strong operational interaction occurring currently.

What I would like to see in 5 years - or even before - is for them to take a proactive role and understand the needs much before it is brought to their notice, proactively

manage the expansions, have discussions and not just confine to the next year's need but to see beyond that (NHR-SM05).

I don't think they are [being strategic]. Some people don't even know what our job is or anything as such. They may have some idea, but they don't understand it completely (NHR-SM11).

NHR-SM05 narrates that they have confidence in the HR Director, but that they 'get involved' themselves as HR practitioners who are not delivering.

Anything below [the HR Director], the specific requirements that happens on a usual basis, they have a difficulty, because the top guy only has changed the rest are still there. So that soft peddling thing is happening there. So, I have to get involved (NHR-SM05).

NHR-SM05 also expresses strategic concern around the HRF's understanding what their unit does, while also articulating that they had to intervene even for the placing of an advertisement for hiring new staff.

I think here HR has to understand the [what my unit does and] the importance of it. And they have to understand how important the people working there is important. And how different should they be from the other normal staff (NHR-SM05).

NHR-SM05 narrates the strategic activities they require in the future from HR practitioners, which also entailed planning for the future.

This is a bank which is going grow form about 150 branches to 250. I am talking about only [my unit] here, but there's a huge group of staff who are mostly junior. I am looking at specialised people requirement. I would like them to look at industry specific needs, when they are looking at certain recruitment (NHR-SM05).

Yet, with a low impression of HR practitioners and high opinions of the HR Director, NHR-SM05 leveraged their personal relationships to speed up issues encountered when dealing with HR practitioners. To create workable linkage structures, access to the HR Director was seen as a means to enable their BU.

I have a very good informal relationship with [the HR Director] mainly because whenever there's a change here, I need to be the first guy to inform him, and I go through the channels, there might be a delay and I don't want it. It cannot be tolerated, because we work with few specialized people (NHR-SM05)

Accordingly, there are future desires to create a two-way linkage, but the relationship is more reflective of a confined structure.

Addressing the strategic value of the HRF, NHR-SM10 draws attention to their own technical specialisation, as well as that of the HRF.

I think the thing is, obviously they are specialised in their area and they should be advising us and they should be linking with different departments. When dealing with top stuff, HR kind of like runs away (NHR-SM10)

The scope of work for this participant was highly specialised, but the BU structure had not greatly expanded since the post-crisis restructuring, so the senior manager's span of control remained narrow. This unit head had also been recruited from outside the bank, and while their unit was responsible for day to day activities, much of their strategically aligned daily work utilised a project based structure for the implementation of supporting solutions within the bank. These tended to have longer planning horizons, and were mostly linked to documented formal strategic outcomes.

Yet operationally, the HRF was highly reactive to the BU's needs and this had greatly enabled this BU.

HR is very key (sic), and all of us need them in the organisation. If you take my area per say, the role is to identify people, agree on structures and all that. Besides that, I realise their value and I too interact with them with that in mind (NHR-SM10).

The key to operational enablement for this unit was access to specified exact requirements of talent. While having a desire for the HRF to offer value in the future around how their unit could benefit from stronger linkages, most important to NHR-SM10 was the HRF being operationally responsive to these requirements. In this case, they dealt with HR practitioners themselves rather

than going to the HR director. NHR-SM10 sought strategic value from the HRF, referencing their specialist skills being employed to offer value, and the need for the HRF to take the lead role in proactively engaging this BU in this capacity.

The narrower scope of work meant the degree of strategic ambiguity for this unit was low regarding PSLB's sought outcomes, as scope documentation and project planning tightly defined deliverables. Higher levels of ambiguity were, however, articulated to be associated with the solving of technical problems within the project, which did not only require flexible operational reactions by the HR function to assist. They also sought a proactive strategic engagement to establish frameworks of understanding where strategic challenges lay, and how these could be addressed by the HRF suggesting value given their expertise.

The focus with this senior manager therefore leant more towards the HRF understanding the strategic needs of this BU in terms of their broader daily challenges and operating environment. They sought strategic contribution not so much from deeply immersing themselves in their strategic planning or by proactively collaborating in HR needs analysis, but more so from proactively understanding where this unit itself fitted into the organisation strategically, and from the strategic and operational impact of HR policies and practices of enabling or disabling their unit where adaptive value addition could jointly occur.

Interestingly, within this BU was a highly functional project structure where the HRF partnered with this unit to develop organisational technological

infrastructure in which the HRF was highly proactive. In this situation, the HRF was the client, and the BU partnered with the HRF to deliver the system. Given this, the BU felt that the framework was highly proactively driven by the HRF. Yet, when the tables were turned, the degree of proactivity attending to the BU's own needs diminished quickly.

While such a strong working relationship did not facilitate proactive strategic enactment on the HRF's part, working closely with HR practitioners on technology projects seemed to greatly enhance the operational reactivity at the HR practitioner level. As one HR practitioner notes

I work closely with on an HR systems project we are developing. I know that many people related issues can slow down their project a lot, so we help out as much as we can

This relationship also appears to exhibit a confined linkage of alternating one-way interactions.

6.3.6 Operational responsiveness

This subsection discusses a third grouping of BUs that did not seek proactive engagement instigated by HRF. Rather, they sought an operational reactionary response driven by the unit's needs. This contrasted with the first two groupings by this cluster of units being satisfied with a narrower scope of interaction. These unit heads did not seek HR to provide an anticipatory framework or plan, nor was instigation of interaction from HR sought by the unit. Rather, a simple reactionary transaction defined the interaction from the SBU to HR. Perceptions of the HR function were linked to the way HR accommodated their staffing issues. Such a relationship here is also framed as strategic, yet the value is not placed on proactivity, rather reaction.

For these units, strategic responsiveness was operational responsiveness, but as HR played a central role in providing human capital, these perceptions gravitated towards strategic importance. Such perceptions of strategic integration were not aligned to dominant theoretical positions of *being strategic* that appear within the literature.

The findings of Welch and Welch (2012) also illuminate the occurrence of this situation. They note that " [d]uring the data analysis process, it became apparent that the prevailing divide between strategic and operational roles was somewhat limiting, as we identified instances where, in enacting their roles, IHR managers were strategic in the performance of what normally would be classified as operational roles" (p. 611).

The prevailing notion of strategic integration for this cluster of BUs was driven by requests from the BU themselves, with the unit head gauging the quality of interaction based on HR's ability to accommodate the unit's specific needs. In these cases, the critical criteria for judging the 'quality of interaction' was being able to deal with the HR Director himself, on an as-needed basis. This entailed circumventing middle management formal practices. Here, the new HR Director's willingness to engage and accommodate senior managers was in stark contrast to the previous HR Director.

Accordingly, assessments of *being strategic* are based on the HR Director's willingness to immediately act on administrative practices, which enabled these BUs. If the unit had access to the HR Director, and the HR Director was open to working within an accommodating framework, the interactions were

seen as positive and strategically aligned. Narratives below illustrate this form of integration.

The first narrative illustrates the importance of HR Director level intervention upon challenging one off cases.

I could very comfortably say I have not had any negativity with regard to HR. Now, when I took over [the unit] I felt a person who was in the position of manager was not competent, and I said, I do not want him as a manager here, I want him removed or transferred. [...] they did that, they helped me do it, and as a result we got off ground as per timelines and deadlines, and now it's working perfectly. I must say, if I had that guy still here I wouldn't have done it (NHR-SM08).

A second narrative offers the most direct illustration of operational reactivity. Here, the BU simply provided an organisational chart to the HRF, and expected the HR function to deliver value by ensuring their positions were filled. In the final narrative, this same senior manager presents a position where strategic interaction 'could only occur at senior management levels of interaction'. Interestingly, despite framing their interaction as strategic, and only being able to occur at a senior level, this unit was found to have the least amount of interaction within the HRF.

We prepare our organisation chart which we send to them, and in that we identify the expertise required for each unit (NHR-SM09).

Head of HR, I always deal with the head of department. Because I am head of a department so I deal with the same. Our relationship is very strategic focused (NHR-SM09).

Narratives here tended to frame day-to-day responsiveness rather than a forward state of preparation or integration in their determination of what is strategic. In instances where I introduced a question pertaining to strategic interaction, the participant's response tended to continue to frame HR strategic activity as being reflective of the ability to pick up the phone and have

individual issues addressed on a case by case instance. The value of this approach was seen with having direct access to the head of HR, and the response from HR to address the BU's operational and strategic needs.

The interaction discussed so far consisted of a group who strongly sought proactive engagement from the HRF, but were not receiving it. This group desired proactive strategic integration but felt they were being disabled through current BU-HR praxis. There was also a cluster that sought proactive strategic engagement, but whose interaction to date was adequate, given a future time when such proactivity could be achieved. This group therefore sought proactive strategic integration, but were content with reactive strategic integration for the time being. The third sought no proactive engagement if their needs were addressed case by case, which was occurring in their perspective. This was representative of reactive operational integration, yet the BU framed these too as strategic, despite the enactment of praxis being operational in nature.

6.3.7 Proactive strategic and operational interaction occurring

In the final group, a sole unit narrated interacting with the HRF with high levels of proactive strategic and operational integration. Here, the senior manager noted that both the HRF and BU interacted in the joint planning for both functions on strategic issues, while the HR function also proactively engaged with the BU on their own operational elements.

When I am developing [unit] plans and strategic plans, HR plays a key role in my successful of this. My [unit] cannot be successful if it's not delivered at the moment of truth. HR has to be directly aligned, and I believe [what we revised and are planning to do this year] is critical. Because [the head of HR] came in, and for me he is an asset. He has changed the way people look at HR (NHR-SM02).

Such a relationship with the HR Director reflects an integrative linkage with the HRF. Characteristics of this BU environment were also highly dynamic, with the senior manager being an *outsider*. They also illustrated strong propensity for the value of people, action and planning, as illustrated in their narrative below.

Number one, the key component for me is that we can do a lot of things with the communication in terms of research and finding insights and developing products. But end of the day there's no point of any product development corporate communications, driving the image of the bank, and drive brand equity, but it won't be of any use if it not delivered to my customer when he walks into the branch (NHR-SM02).

This senior manager also narrated the strategic need for HRF support, as their own BU objectives were very much aligned to HR. They narrate:

How can I go around there and fight for it when HR doesn't believe in it? The CEO can turn around any minute and say, that's not your problem. If HR isn't making it an issue what's yours (NHR-SM02)?

Furthermore, they illustrated identity constructs of both an outsider and not being a banker, as the senior manager expresses:

I'll be very honest and abrupt, see I have come from outside I have been here only for 5 years and my perspective is different, I am not a banker (NHR-SM02)?

These dynamics saw this senior manager also challenge ingrained logics of the bank and recursive practices of the past. Despite the renounced service quality, internal dynamics were reported as a shock, as expressed below.

When I came to the bank I had a lot of expectations because it was a service oriented organisation and I had a culture shock. My expectations and what was actually here was very different. Of course, I am relatively younger than most of the others (NHR-SM02).

In summary, this senior manager sought and received an integrative linkage with the HRF.

6.3.8 Summary

Based on the interview data of senior managers, I have identified that different HRF-BU linkages (under Golden and Ramanujan's (1985) framework) emerged in the partnering of the HRF and their business partners. Senior managers narrated varied positions as to their desired and experienced linkages. These include different ideal states of proactive and reactive frameworks across both administrative-support and strategic activities. Yet, all activities were framed to be strategically relevant to the BU, with my findings indicating where administrative linkages were found, and they remained vital to BUs (Sarvaiya et al., 2015). Accordingly, a contribution this research makes to scholarship is to address the absence of different employee segments from within the literature (Boxall, 2012; Jackson et al., 2014).

Evidence in this section suggests that both linkage variations arise out of contextual differences (Sarvaiya et al., 2015). Research has identified that not all employees necessarily contribute in the same manner (Huselid et al., 2005; Lepak & Snell, 1999b) or operate within the same HR system (Boxall, 2012). For example, highly skilled knowledge workers themselves, rather than the firm, have been reported to drive HR systems (Ruiner et al., 2013).

What this research has found is that variations of systems and HR linkages occur across BUs within the same firm. In this single case organisation setting, the differences of desired and experienced HR-BU linkages support arguments that organisations may not be nearly as homogeneous as they are often reported to be (Colakoglu, Lepak, & Hong, 2006). There is an argument that different BUs should not be treated homogeneously - different linkage

frameworks are perceived as being more ideally suited to different units.

Rather, the HRF should attend to each BU's own unique position to best enable their direction.

6.4 Variations of HRM Collaboration

Collaboration “refers to the networking of spatially segregated actors of HRM, such as HRM professionals, line managers, [and] employees (Gueutal, Strohmeier, & Kabst, 2009, p. 485). For these scattered HR actors, collaboration therefore offers the prospect of coordination advantages that can lead to innovations towards organising HRM (Lepak & Snell, 1998). Within my data, collaborative practices were found to occur within both administrative and overtly strategic activities.

Chapter 5 found that strategic actions were embedded across HR roles. This makes grouping strategic elements more difficult when reporting strategically collaborative practices. I therefore draw on the work of Mantere (2005), who dealt with these issues by creating three clusters of strategically relevant activity that were immediately apparent to him. I do the same in the analysis of interview data from my study, as these categories were immediately apparent to me as well. The utility of employing them allows differing notions of strategy to transcend roles. The three categories of practices illustrated by Mantere and used by me in this thesis are strategy formation (6.5), organisation (6.6) and control practices (6.7). The collaboration of the HRF with BU's has been coded to these three categories, with the dominant role illustrated in these collaborative interactions.

6.5 Strategic formation practice collaboration

This section draws from interview data to illustrate the collaboration between HRF and BUs around strategic formation practices. Formation practices entail collaborations that were focused around the creation of systems and initiatives. My data revealed collaboration around value adding systems (6.5.1) occurred with the development of a strategic information technology (IT) initiative, as well as organically between the HR Director and NHR-SM02. I then discuss variations of formation practices found within PSLB (6.5.2) and examine how strategic documents were used to make sense of pursuing formation practices (6.5.3). Finally, I look at the role of feedback mechanisms in formation collaborative practices (6.5.4).

6.5.1. Collaborating on value adding systems

Value adding systems that were perceived by both BUs and the HRF most closely encompass a shared understanding of what *being more strategic* entailed. These were most prevalent in collaborative formulation practices found across PSLB. The highest levels of collaborative partnership with the HRF were found in two disparate contexts. The first was linked to a strategic IT initiative derived from the strategic plan, while the second was an organic relationship that developed with a BU.

6.5.1.1 Strategic IT initiative

This was an explicitly defined initiative that developed an IT system for hiring, transfers and promotions that would also include capabilities mapping of human capital. It was intended to address competency alignment concerns found across PSLB and to better assist mobility practices in general. Very

overtly, this project resulted in very high levels of collaboration between the HR function and the internal BU aligned to technology. As one senior manager noted:

[...] we got HR to talk to us about what they wanted, and then we also added our value and then we sat with the vendor, and he has a close relationship with us and the HR. [...] We sat together and understood the requirements. There was a system back in the days that is 3 years back when I joined, but they were not streamlined, and that's what I did along with looking at the user requirements. And we also looked at new things the system itself brought in like the business intelligence thing (NHR-SM10).

The nature of this collaboration entailed a close relationship between two internal parties and one external vendor in which the degree of collaboration was high. More subtly however, the criteria for competency alignments needed to account for all the BUs within PSLB. For success, this required additional secondary collaborations with all BU stakeholders to define the specific competency needs across all BUs that enabled performative outcomes. This was an element which was not being attended to with all BUs, and is closely linked to the sensegiving element of strategy formation discussed in a later subsection. Essentially, there was close collaboration and value delivery on the creation of a system, but limited praxis exhibited to populate the system with criteria. Particularly, there were low levels of collaboration with several BUs who expressed a poor understanding by the HRF around what they did, and the skills and criteria required for competency mapping. A representative narrative from BUs experiencing this disconnection comes from one senior manager:

Some people don't even know what our job is or anything as such. They may have some idea, but they don't understand it completely (NHR-SM11).

Come and see us, see what we do (NHR-SM11).

Accordingly, while there was a high degree of collaboration on this project, secondary collaborations with broader stakeholders that would enable intent of the project were not occurring. This in turn reduced the performative impact of the collaboration across all stakeholders within PSLB. One HR practitioner further amplifies the HRF's understanding of competencies in an area where there is a high level of daily engagement – with branches. When I enquire as to where competency maps occur, they respond:

Not at HR, but at the line management level they have their skill inventory. There's no comprehensive system, but they maintain a record. They know where the person is thorough. We have a record in our HR system as well, because we maintain our staff rotation card. So, we know who's competent and thorough in what. We have an idea (HR-PR03).

Also emerging are some tensions between how competencies should be understood. One HR practitioner who had a strong HR specialist identity articulates the need for those within the units at the line to articulate competencies. This of course makes sense, but it is the direction of instigation of this that runs counter to some BUs (particularly specialist areas) that seek the HRF to approach them to understand their dynamics and required staff competency requirements. This practitioner's narrative is representative of HR practitioners in general:

In case of competencies, it is the line management who should come out because they see the people a lot; they should come out and tell us who is best at what or who needs more training and development in what, so HR can make them achieve those objectives (HR-PR05).

To conclude, while integration is found to be high within this particular project, broader collaboration around populating the competency system is lacking, mitigating the collaborative purpose of the project. HR practitioner

positions around how competencies should be understood put the onus on BUs to come to them, rather than HR practitioners going to the BU. This reduces the areas that the HRF could be collaborating through formation practices.

6.5.1.2 Multi-episode collaborations

In the second identified area, the nature of collaboration was broad, occurring across multiple episodes and multiple domains. This organic relationship did not develop through interactions in which collaborations were overtly prescribed, but rather through joint sensemaking between the HR Director and their unit head. As already discussed in section 6.3.7, this senior manager dealt with high levels of ambiguity through extensions of their role including a wider span of control over individual financial products within the bank, increasing their need for significant levels of collaboration with other BUs.

Both HR-SM02 and the HR Director jointly narrated the highest levels of BU collaboration between themselves. They were working on multiple collaborations that included communication structures, training alignments and overall motivation alignments across the entire bank. Collaborations were inherently linked to broader strategic beliefs in the connection of people to performance and service delivery. NHR-SM02 notes:

Number one, the key component for me is that we can do a lot of things with the communication in terms of research and finding insights and developing products. But at the end of the day there's no point of any product development corporate communications, driving the image of the bank, and drive brand equity, but it won't be of any use if it not delivered to my customer when he walks into the branch (NHR-SM02).

The HR Director narrates a strong position to a strategic systems approach to HRM that is jointly shared by NHR-SM02.

I have to prepare a salary structure, model of recruiting, who are the people, and the whole thing of the sales force creation, service structure and incentive structure creation all of that should be there. Then the customer service, I would have to train the people, bring the necessary level of quality. If I don't do that, he wouldn't achieve KPI's (NHR-SM02).

There were also significant levels of familiarity of the overall visions each had in respect to their own BUs, and a distinct orientation to deliver value through both BU's own companies. The HR Director was aware of all the issues faced, discussing them below.

Also [NHR-SM02] is planning to do some restructuring, if I am not going to give my knowledge to that, he is not in a position to take those couple of initiatives. Both of us need to work very closely than [with] others (HR-SM).

NHR-SM02 accounts for this by narrating:

We understand and we are aligned in our thinking (NHR-SM02).

There were also significant levels of familiarity of the overall visions each senior manager had in respect to their own BUs, and a distinct orientation to deliver value through both BUs contributing their own skill sets.

To conclude, where opportunity existed to further involve themselves in a secondary collaboration (the IT project) not defined by the organisational centre, HR practitioners did not exhibit agency to do so. In the second formation practice collaboration, it is the HR Director who is engaged in collaboration without the involvement of HR practitioners. Therefore, evidence suggests that formation practices by HR practitioners within PSLB support implementation of a wider defined direction, while the HR Director takes a broader role with a specific BU.

6.5.2 Variation between senior management and middle management collaboration

While there were high levels of collaboration between the HR Director and NHR-SM02, this collaboration was not found to occur at the middle management levels of analysis. A middle manager in this BU recognised the collaboration at the senior management level occurring, yet noted that this did not occur at the middle management level despite there being a great need to do so. They directed their narrative towards dealing with HR practitioners in which a fundamental mindset difference existed. The disposition of the HRF to treat this unit as bankers did cognitively constrained the HRF from understanding their roles and what was needed to enable them.

The middle (who works under senior manager NHR-SM02) articulates the difference.

Here the banker does 8.30 to 5pm, you close your cash, and you go home. If you are a credit person, you close your file and start again the next morning. But here it is a never-ending job. If we are not doing something, our competitor will (NHR-MM15).

This was seen to inhibit any potential collaboration at the middle management level, despite in principle strong synergies to do so.

[...] Whatever we do here it should be executed by the branch staff which again is human capital. [...] more than anyone, we should be walking together to achieve a common goal (NHR-MM15).

Also, narratives by this BU's middle management were drawn towards mobility practices and competency alignment issues. Collaboration, and the BUs own frustrations with staffing, merge into a narrative from which collaboration and their own experiences of operational issues merge.

[...] HR should basically look based on the type of work you do. Banking and what we do are two different things. The way we function, sometimes our job roles will be

24 hours and 365 days, our job roles do not limit it. Because of this, the difference should be understood for these different departments and you can't be looking at it from the same yardsticks. How can we collaborate like this (NHR-MM15)?

The avenues for impromptu collaboration were seen as limited and futile by this middle manager. One manager commented:

Not really, there isn't a forum to bring out such idea. You need to bring it up at the correct forum where it is recorded and followed up. Pointless just mentioning it at a dinner or over a cup of tea. Then the tendency is that it might not or might be followed up. Especially HR issues, there should be a proper way to be discussed. In such a case, whatever discussed could be identified and the staff can act accordingly (NHR-MM15).

The reliance on formal structures were seen as more advantageous than informal interactions for this middle manager. They positioned formal structures to develop creative practices, yet the formal avenues also appeared to limit innovation as they were structured around largely operational elements.

Another middle manager within this unit reflects on the proactivity of HR practitioners attending to their needs.

We will never see HR coming to us and asking us what we can do for you this year (NHR-MM14)

The perceptions across PSLB in general at the middle manager level reflected the attitudes of middle managers within this unit, as reflected in the narratives below.

One thing is that the bank's HR department does not have a principle objective or overall idea as to what we are going to do with our HR. They don't have a collective idea, which they should. Then if that's there, then they know how to integrate different functions and people. That's something they lack, where they just do the firefighting and facing the issues, but does not plan (NHR-MM02).

[...] when we get staff, it's just a head to head thing that happens. Just because you have the technical knowledge it doesn't mean you suit here. Similarly, just because you're PR is good, you can't be here because you need that technical knowledge, its substantial values you are dealing with. You can't afford it. The repercussions are huge. Which unfortunately HR can't seem to understand that it's not everybody you can put in here (NHR-MM12).

Thus, collaboration between the BU middle manager and the HR practitioners was disabled by perceptions from BU middle managers that HR practitioners were constrained by their own banker identities and mindsets, and ability to understand the unique needs of BUs. In the case of NHR-MM02's BU, the highly integrative linkages occurring between the senior manager and the HR Director were not reflected between HR practitioners and middle managers. This was also the case for the broader bank.

6.5.3. Referencing strategic planning targets

Some HR practitioners were required to reference strategic planning targets explicitly to undertake their role. In manpower planning, for instance, reviewing strategic targets was the basis of their own planning. Within the formal structure, these were the basis of collaboration. The HR planning surrounding this was based on numerical interpretations of the strategic plan, such as new branches to be opened. The number would then be the basis for the HR function to formulate approaches to acquire the required numbers.

Actually, we work on the manpower planning first. It comes from the Strategic Plan. From there it's cascaded. We will know what we want, how many expansions. Focus on the resignations, whether there are any new branches to be opened. We work on a man power plan (NHR-MM03).

The dissemination of this information, however, was not accessed directly, but rather via the HR Director. “Actually, it's communicated from [the HR Director] and cascaded down to me”. In these cases, tighter policy driven practices surrounded such activities – and constrained collaboration to the

specific task at hand, while also restricting the ability to adapt these practices to be more meaningful to BU partners. Once formulated, these were backed up through formal mechanisms of the director of HR to unit heads, and ultimately the CEO.

In fact, no one within the HR department had direct access to the strategic plan itself, with access being gained through the HR Director. In such cases, no HR practitioner was provided access to the strategic plan. Rather, targets derived from it were the basis of further extrapolations for the KPI structure. Such targets were not delivered in their entirety either, but rather in segments. However, while the overall strategic plan and financial targets that stemmed from this were somewhat secretive in their whole form, there appeared to be no centralised position to withhold pertinent information from middle managers within the bank. Access in part was found to be wholly possible through request and approval.

As already discussed, mobility practices were a central element within PSLB narratives that were embedded within strategic discourse. The HRF's manpower planning entailed collaboration. In the case of the extensive branch network where manpower resulted in the greatest volume of activity, the HRF's approach was to utilise targets derived from the strategic plan as the basis for manpower planning. Yet the strategic targets the HRF accessed were not accompanied by explicit means to achieve targets or framed in a manner that provided context to the HRF.

Yet, with little proactive contact, the HRF's own functional level strategy resulted in HR practitioners at the middle management level drawing on their

own individual interpretations of strategy through the strategic documents alone. HR practitioners were emotive towards employees and line management positions across change agent, employee champion and administrative expert's position. Therefore, interpretations were drawn from strategic documents not accompanied by top-down sensegiving. This meant any adaptive changes that utilised HRF actor agency were drawn from downward looking perspectives towards the line. HR practitioners' interpretations of mobility practices further drew from their own experiences at the line for adaptive interpretation.

6.5.4 Feedback mechanisms and collaboration

Narratives concerning feedback mechanisms appeared across PSLB in strategic discourse. These were intertwined with assessments of collaboration activities. Feedback was central to notions of strategic integration, and this entailed a means for feedback to occur.

It should be a collective effort, at the end of the day I don't think HR can come in and tell us what to do, neither can I do same for them. Especially my area being so specialised, whenever I voice my concern or something I'd want HR to listen to me. Generally, over a period of time whatever I have said has been very calculated and always has had some affect. Even these four guys leaving I actually kept saying this will happen 2 years before that, where no one took notice of it back then. When you are head and close to your staff because of the small environment, we know exactly what is going on, so HR has a bigger role in supportive the functions (NHR-SM06).

Upward directed formal feedback from the HR function passed from the HR Director to senior management through formal Corporate Planning Committee meetings, as did top-down feedback towards the HRF. However, indications of collaboration misalignments did not largely seem to reach the intended audiences within this framework, as indicated through prolific narratives of BUs that felt the HRF did not yet understand their needs. Across the remainder

of BUs, value adding systems tended to encompass the incremental development of existing practices.

The operationalisation of strategic targets was another feedback mechanism that in theory offered explicit mechanisms to embark on collaboration.

Explicit formal strategic targets and KPI structures linked the HRF to the BU by directly or indirectly supporting BUs. Feedback mechanisms therefore should be indicative of a strong onus towards collaborative efforts. However, this largely did not occur. The HR function itself was responsible for running the KPI system, yet this was not used as a mechanism by the HRF to align their collaborative efforts towards improvements.

For the HRF, there was an indication that this was a viable means for feedback, collaboration, and even intervention, yet no praxis surrounding the utilisation of these tools existed as indicated by the response to questions surrounding this.

We could use that info for training and development. Like if someone is rated low on credit, we could get them down and give them training on credit (HR-MM02).

Senior managers felt that the HR practitioners were unable to offer value in setting up of the KPI structure, yet there was no preclusion for the interpretation of data of human capital elements aligned to performance attributes.

The HR is only collecting the KPI sheet and presenting it to the board. They don't really get involved in the setting up of the targets and the individual criteria. I don't think they cannot. They link the entire staff only to the global measurement (NHR-SM01).

Some active agency had however been employed on other HR practitioners' parts to provide the beginnings of an upwards directed feedback mechanism. They were however frustrated with the outcomes of their efforts. Such frustration was directed towards not being able to enable BUs due to limited abilities to offer analysis of data which the HRF had enacted through corporate management level. They articulate a limited ability to mine data and turn it into useful information. The primary source of data used for feedback was the staff survey. Where the HR practitioner did a deeper analysis on the survey, there was little repetitive response.

So, all that we are using from that information is for the annual report, there's one sentence to say staff motivation level [has gone] from 71 to 72 - that particular thing. But I made a small booklet analysing the whole thing, graphically, which was never paid any attention to (HR-PR05).

Accordingly, while pockets of collaboration existed within smaller micro-structures, they existed largely in refinement of existing HR practices or in firefighting interventions to attend to immediate needs. Such relationships excluded broader high level strategic collaborations, which came from different frames of reference. Additionally, HR acting as a line of communication straight through to senior management was not occurring as employees went straight to their own unit head rather than passing feedback through the HRF. Therefore, these elements fall more under organisational and control elements of collaboration.

6.6 Organising Practices

Collaboration between HR practitioners and BUs focused mostly on organising practices. While the interpretations of strategic formulation

discussed above varied as to the contributions sought by BUs and those made towards formation practices by the HRF, clearly across PSLB there is a significant role expectation for the HRF to engage in collaboration in organising practices. The adage that structure follows strategy (Chandler, 1962) corresponds to individual tasks developed to support strategic implementation (Mantere, 2005). Collaboration through organising practices existed in HR training practices, mobility practices, and career paths. Interpretation of narratives as a whole reflect a strong belief across all levels of analysis that if these elements complement organisational strategy, they will enable the organisation and the BU (Mantere, 2005).

I now discuss the misalignments of practices occurring within organising practices (6.6.1), and phenomena found surrounding negotiated practise (6.6.2), supplementary support (6.6.3) and specialist BUs.

6.6.1 Practice misalignments

Varied BU contexts and imperfect communication channels with HR practitioners made interpretation of how HR systems best enable organisational strategy difficult. As such, the slow-moving wheels of change resulted in misalignments of formal HR practice. Where formal practices had not been aligned to enable ideal strategic configurations, negotiation of praxis within formal policies became a central element of organisational collaborations between BUs and the HRF to alleviate strategic misalignment and subsequent tensions. These were seemingly small in nature, yet when applied, were reported to greatly enhance the BU's ability to deliver strategic value and perceptions of the HRF.

6.6.2 Negotiated practices

Within recruitment and transfer practices where units did not fall under the specialised HR policies - which granted them more autonomy to hire from outside the bank - some BUs collaborated with the HRF by developing praxis frameworks of mobility practices. These involved the senior manager of the BU negotiating practices with the HRF, such as them sitting in on hiring interviews, or providing far more specific competency requirements through additional channels outside the official hiring system.

I was given the ability to identify the good people, to take them to the bank, and others - pay them something and get rid of them. So that helped me to get the good staff at my own decision and evaluations (NHR-SM-04).

6.6.3 Supplementary support

Supplementary support was also obtained through collaborations between HR and BU heads. One senior manager narrates collaborating with HR to organise support staff.

It is what I wanted and what I had done, and it worked well. My interaction was purely with HR, because I needed staff. When I came in, not every lawyer had an assistant, they agreed to different time frames to give me the required staff. Predominantly creating those divisions were what I wanted (HNR-SM09).

Collaboration accommodations also occurred though the director of HR switching the role of HR outside of policy to having a BU drive their recruitment.

6.6.4 Specialist business units

Organising collaboration also existed within specialised units, where policies enabled far more flexibility for these units.

Then we sorted out the applicants and then asked [HR] to join the interview and finally we chose. [The HR Director] coming in, there's a more stability now in HR.

The need was someone who knew HR principals and foundations properly (HNR-SM10).

This senior manager further articulates the motives for this collaboration beyond the control element of approval.

I always want HR to be there at the interview also, to get a greater reason (sic) so they get an idea what the market is actually. So, for all of that, HR being there is useful (NHR-SM10).

This is however counter to another specialised BU's position where conflicting notions of collaboration and proactive integration for specialised units are illustrated in one senior manager's narrative. Asked about the HRF's impact on performance, they note:

Helping us retain the staff, I don't think there's any other way they could help us improve the bottom line. I guess here it's a combination of career progression, job enrichment plus the other benefits, market level salaries and all (NHR-SM06).

These are indicative of organisational practices with the BU being one of the most technical within PSLB. This unit's senior manager also had a strong belief that their skills were unable to be assessed by the HRF, yet they valued the efforts of the HR Director working towards collaboration and proactive interaction.

I can't say for the 3 years, but maybe under the present management I see some difference. A big sort of collaborative approach or maybe even a proactive approach trying to gage what our requirements are and trying to address our issues before an issue pops up (NHR-SM06).

Training was another element of organisational collaboration to emerge within narratives. For BUs in which the HRF was the primary training provider, the principal medium of communication for training needs was circulars. These were, however, more representative of instructions or requirements handed down from on high. These dramatically reduced ambiguity for the HR

practitioners receiving them, and acted as a sensegiving artefact in which instructions were to be followed. Emails or telephone calls stating training requirements were also found. The training subunit did not work based on producing formal plans, but rather as a structure that aligned to broad strategic requirements. Collaborative interactions were generally directed to the HR function, rather than discussed.

We don't have a plan, we have a framework, so based on that we align our training. It's now structured as a bank, the customer service is the main thing, so to align to that thing we will plan training programs, product knowledge, technical training programs and interpersonal training programs. Everything will be planned according to that (NHR-MM08).

An exception to this practice was NHR-SM02's BU. This senior manager worked very closely with the HRF on developing training for not only their unit, but also contributed towards the training framework.

We were working together even 15 minutes ago on a training and development plan across categories and how to structure that. This senior manager also volunteered to be a trainer during new employee induction sessions and within training modules related to sales and motivation (HNR-SM02).

6.7 Control practices

Control practice narratives entailed practices around the distribution of resources (Giddens, 1984). Within the data, narratives emerged where actors sought to influence such allocations (Mantere, 2005). Control practice collaboration represented mechanisms on how resources were distributed and leveraged related to human capital within PSLB. Tensions were found regarding the praxis frameworks of control. Clear and explicit channels for resource allocation were seen by some as critical for the betterment of the bank. The middle manager NHR-MM15 sought formal mechanisms for collaboration, not trusting that anything would be enacted outside of a formal

channel. Similarly, they sought for the HRF to gain feedback through official mechanisms to understand and align resources that were suitable to their context situation.

6.7.1 Accessing resources

The framing of collaboration for some participants therefore existed within systems that enable access to resources. One senior manager explains why they on occasion directly engage the CEO rather than collaborating with the HRF.

See, when I went to meet the [HR Director], I follow the HR's policies and principles in place. When it goes to the CEO he gets an idea that I am in that field and I have that understanding of reality. On the other hand, when I go to the CEO first, I only have to inform HR that I have obtained [the CEO's] approval, let's advertise or whatever like that (NHR-SM10).

Such direct pathways to the CEO reflect an individual's own ability to influence resource outcomes outside of control channels. This has been shown to be enabled by personal networks (Mantere, 2005), which these actors utilised.

The structure within PSLB meant that policy decisions sometimes ultimately rested with the CEO. However, in such cases other BUs collaborated with the HR Director on upwards influences of resource allocation. The strongest collaboration was between the new director of HR and NHR-SM02, in which they narrated a systematic approach to this collaboration, rather than on an individual case by case basis where needs aligned. Here they operated as a team to influence change.

So, when you want to convince the CEO that we need to do 'XYZ', how can you do it if the HR doesn't believe it? It needs us to team up. I am just one stakeholder to [the CEO], so we need to think and team up (NHR-SM02).

Within the corporate planning committee, I also observed NHR-SM02 and the HR Director sitting together in their meeting, and championing each other's ideas on two occasions. At first the HR Director supported NHR-SM02's idea, followed shortly afterwards with the reverse case occurring.

Another business unit head was also found to collaborate with the director of HR on issues that aligned to their position but from which the CEO approval was required. Such collaboration was instigated by the HR Director in informal settings with his colleagues to build support for their initiatives.

Yes, that's one of the things that happen when we meet up this way informally. Even if HR plans, let say to introduce something like a quality initiative, or people management or some training concept, certainly sharing and discussing those at these types of informal discussions or otherwise does happen. And they would require our help. It doesn't happen in a way that it comes straight away and is being pushed to the CEO (NHR-SM03).

There is also evidence of middle managers utilising the Director of HR to ensure their activities are enabled rather than going through HR practitioners.

One middle manager notes that they maintain contact with the HR Director specifically to better facilitate their plans and activities.

I raise issues then and there and whenever I go to the head office I make it a point to sit and take time to discuss. And I also plan ahead, and I don't wait for things to happen. When I foresee something, I keep on following it up and make sure it's done (NHR-MM17).

This section has shown that complexities of accessing resources for BU resulted in different ways of addressing resources by BUs. Here, noticeably, it is the control practices of HR partners that come through. The impact of human capital on BU activities is underscored, as is the importance of the HR function. When thwarted with achieving access to resources, organisational actors assert agency to mitigate the impact of suboptimal HRF linkage.

6.7.2 Summary of collaboration practices

Addressing collaboration, I have illustrated formation, organisation and control practices occurring within PSLB. This framework has offered the ability to transcend linkages dominant within the literature around strategically relevant issues. The advantage gained from the application of Mantere's (2005) SAP approach to HRM-BU collaboration is that it allows collaboration to emerge that may have not otherwise done so. Accordingly, such an approach transcends the strength and type of linkage (that has been traditionally used) to illustrate practices that occur. This case is particularly useful in multi-level research, as the variations of relationships across PSLB are vast. Rather, utilising formation, organising and controlling practices offers a means to account for these varied ways of doing within a framework, which illuminate how, where and why collaboration with the HRF enables or disables BU activities.

6.8 Factors influencing strategic intergration

Due to the connectivity of phenomena already discussed in previous chapters, this section draws upon phenomena already identified within my research. This is done in a framework that distils the factors influencing strategic integration. The discussion is structured by addressing this research question:

2b: What factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business units?

Through the analysis undertaken within my contextual chapter (chapter 4) and relating to research questions 1 (chapter 6) and 2a (6.3 -6.7), notions of

strategic contribution by HR practitioners vary, both vertically and horizontally across this case study. This has contributed to scholarship that has investigated the problematic nature of strategic integration (e.g. Caldwell, 2003, 2008; Guest & King, 2004; Pritchard, 2010; Truss et al., 2002). Specifically, and in contrast to the majority of scholarship to date, my analysis has not aggregated similarities of participants within a single unit to conceptualised individual level phenomena at an organisational level (Nishii et al., 2008; Renkema et al., 2016). Rather, I have attended to the emergence of strategically relevant phenomena as it was narrated by participants across and throughout all BUs and the HRF.

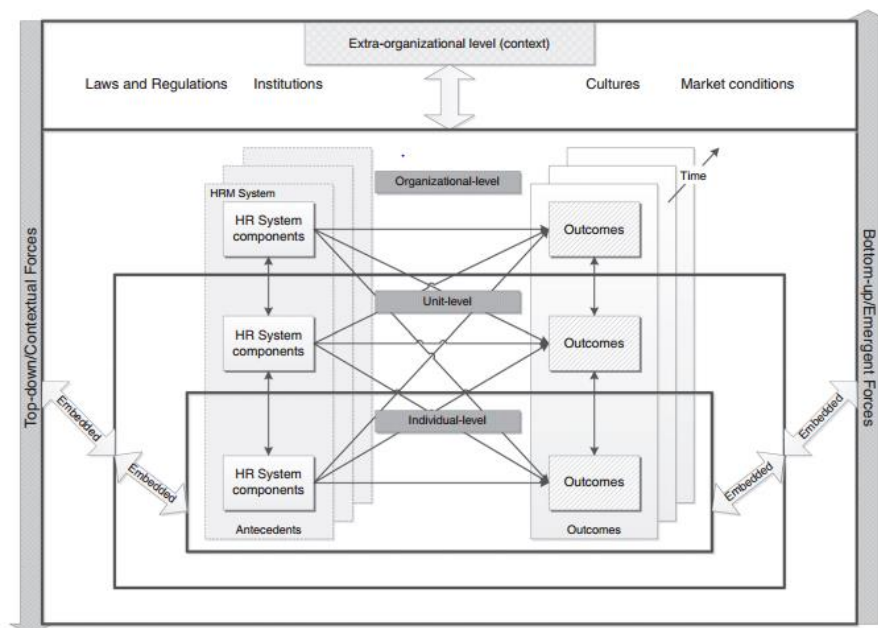
However, given the within-firm contextual variations already reported, the challenge has been to transition from specific and concrete episodes of strategic importance to more abstract notions (Saldaña, 2015) that underpin varied strategic partnership frameworks and assessments of their utility. My analysis thus far has sought to address calls to attend to differences rather than similarities (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Renkema et al., 2016). My findings surrounding differences reflect varying outcomes that enable or disable the HRF's business partners across a continuum, rather than in absolute terms. Furthermore, organisational relationships with HR practitioners entail contextual complexity across time and different levels of analysis (Renkema et al., 2016). My findings also reinforce arguments that becoming a strategic partner entails identity tensions, and an evolution of constructed meaning (Pritchard, 2010). Time, therefore, becomes significant in accounting for the

identification of emerging strategically relevant HRM phenomena (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Renkema et al., 2016).

My attempt to unscramble the complexities of PSLB organisational dynamics that influence strategic integration are shown in figure 6.1. Based on the ‘landscape of unanswered questions’ framework developed by Renkema et al. (2016), I have incorporated the work of Mantere (2005), Mantere and Vaara (2008) and Truss et al. (2002) to guide me through the framework of factors that influence strategic integration within my case setting. The structural framework of Renkema et al. (2016) accounts for the interconnections of the external environment, time, top-down complexity, bottom-up emergent forces, and the interconnection between individual, unit and organisational level phenomena.

It must be noted that although I used a part of Renkema et al.’s (2016) framework in Chapter 4, it was not my intention to employ their entire framework until very late in my analysis. Indeed, the choice to use it has been done to best conceptually represent relevant phenomena that emerged within my analysis of PSLB. As such, my use of this framework is not intended as a model, but rather as a framework to address the complexity of the variation of strategic partnerships found within this research.

Figure 6.1 Framework for factors influencing integration



Taken from Renkema et al. (2016)

The *outcomes* articulated at different levels of analysis portrayed by Renkema et al. (2016) have been captured by utilising Mantere's (2005) and Mantere and Vaara's (2008) strategic enabling and disabling scholarship. The contingent nature of assessments surrounding notions of strategic utility within narratives are discussed through the "discursive construction of social identities and power relations which makes it particularly suitable for [...] analysis of participation in strategy and strategizing". Its particular strength is the ability to capture more abstract performative aspects (Mantere & Vaara, 2008, p. 343). This fits with Renkema et al.'s (2016) framework as it is able to address meaning, praxis, change environments (Burgelman, 1983), senior management's refined understanding of strategy (Mintzberg, 1994), and lower managers' organisational knowledge (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Hart, 1992).

My utilisation of discourse to discuss notions of strategic enablement/disablement does not follow a ‘radical’ position in which everything is framed and concentrated on discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). Rather, it is used in elements of my discussion to explain the contingency surrounding notions of strategic integration. This SAP analysis framework offers several advantages. First, it uses organisational actors as a subject from whom to understand and interpret strategy. Here, analysis of strategy stems from the perspective of the actor. The utility of this activity approach towards my data analysis is that it does not “predispose any particular actor to be a strategy practitioner” (Jarzabkowski & Wolf, 2015, p. 170). This has enabled the identification of strategically relevant activity in places that traditional SHRM scholarship has not paid attention, while also enabling an understanding of the stream of praxis as it evolves within activity systems that transpire over time. (Jarzabkowski & Wolf, 2015).

Furthermore, Truss and colleagues’ (2002) reflection of the difficulties of ‘disentangling’ strategic roles within their model within the banking sector is suitably addressed with this analytical approach. Sections 6.8.1-6.8.4 explore my findings as they relate to each level of figure 6.1.

6.8.1 Extra-organisational level

Often argued within the literature is the importance of structure upon organisational dynamics and, in turn, structure’s influence on HRF role expectations. Within my case this was also found to influence the strategic integration. Chandler’s (1962) maxim that ‘structure follows strategy’ is, however, not well reflected in PSLB when looking at HRM strategic

interaction. Rather, the enablers of HRF strategic interaction at the organisational level are influenced more so by structure. At the organisational level, collective notions of strategic HRM relevance and integration are a product of external market conditions, laws and regulations, institutional forces and culture. These create a structural environment that impacts top-down ways of ‘doing’.

Extra-organisational factors that influence strategic integration are not confined to the organisational level of analysis. Rather, elements flow through the organisational, BU-level and individual levels of analysis. The construct of PSLB at the time of my analysis was the result of three different periods of change that occurred within the bank. Temporally, these stemmed from three distinct time periods within the bank’s ongoing evolution (laws and regulations, institutions, and culture) that also evolve over time. The influence of these extra-organisational factors influences organisational structural dynamics that enable or disable the HRF’s role in strategic integration. They also are embedded in individual identity structures of organisational actors, influencing the way strategic participation is conceived and enacted.

6.8.1.1 Pre –GFC (stable)

PSLB is stable and driven largely by the bank’s chairman, who owns diversified holdings across Sri Lanka. The organisation is found to be driven by developmental logics that strive to fulfil a role that better the lives of Sri Lankans by providing finances that would have otherwise been difficult to access. Future labour union positions are aligned to the normative positioning of management, with hiring and promotion policies seeking to almost entirely

fulfil all non-entry level positions from within. This is found to reinforce an organisational family culture that is also highly service orientated. Regular promotion opportunities resulted in long serving employees (often for their working lives) being “socialised into particular workplace norms and behaviour” (Glover & Butler, 2012, p. 205). While there is little data available regarding the daily activities of the HR function in this period, it was centralised and focused on worker mobility - primarily on facilitating promotions and transfers.

6.8.1.2 Post GFC (unstable)

The coming together of a number of circumstances altered the mission (Glover & Butler, 2012; Oxenbridge & Brown, 2002) of PSLB. New organisational leadership embraced performative logics that were contested by the normative logics entrenched in PSLB. Over time these performative positions become engrained through systems that cater to regulators. New management (outsiders) seek to facilitate broader strategic integration through technology and artefacts to support organisational strategy. KPI structures support performance logics, and attempt to integrate the HRF into the strategic fold. Strategic structures are, however, constrained by banker logics that rely on processes and policies, as well as risk mitigation checks and balances. This limits access too, in the way HR practitioners can understand strategic intent and the ways they align to this intent.

6.8.1.3 Growth (stabilisation to dynamic)

The introduction of the specialist HR Director was found to address a collective desire for the HRF to be a specialist function that can offer value to

PSLB. While this is sought, it was found that strategic structures remain largely unchanged. KPI structures are the first step to linking the HRF to performative logics and strategic connections. Yet, it was found that weak ad hoc access to strategic references limited HR practitioners' abilities to make sense of broader framings. Organisational culture and structures affect upward communication of HR practitioners to senior managers other than the HR Director. Systems and processes limiting upward strategic communication were found to result in HR practitioners drawing upon their own banker logics more heavily to make sense of what being strategic is.

This was further reinforced by regular and consistent interactions with line managers that further shaped their notions of strategy. There are tensions between old ways of doing things (recursive) and new ways (adaptive) that are placed on the HRF. The agency of the HRF to understand the change sought by different BUs is, however, mitigated by structures that give them cues, and by a strong banker identity that constrains their agency to experiences of the past.

6.8.2 Organisational level factors

6.8.2.1 Scope of activities assigned to the HRF

With previous scholarship, whether the HR function serves a more administrative or strategic role has been explained through organisational level factors that are shown to constrain or expand the scope of what the HRF is tasked with doing. Brandl and Pohler (2010) identified confining and widening criteria that stem from the CEO, and their own constraints. These

include the scope of the CEO to make decisions, their willingness to delegate responsibility, and their perception of the aptitude of the HR department.

This research found that governance structures and rules and regulations impacted the scope of activities available to HRF, while labour union influences also limited the scope of the HRF. Collective pay agreements are one such example found within this study. The governance structure of PSLB, in conjunction with legal regulatory factors, impeded the scope of the HRF. The governance structure removed control away from the HRF in areas such as remuneration, therefore reducing the responsibilities of the HRF.

Furthermore, policies surrounding mobility practices co-evolved through a combination of board, regulatory, CEO and senior management inputs that omitted the former HR manager's input. This produced a legacy of policies for the new HR managers that were already in place. The governance structures and a disposition by the CEO to control HR policies meant that the HR Director's scope of authority was restricted. Work with other senior managers to influence policy occurred where the HR Director had strong relationships.

6.8.2.2 Specialist versus banker HR director

At the organisational level of analysis, market conditions forced PSLB into a state of change. Up until the introduction of a 'specialist' HR practitioner to fill the role of HR Director, it was found that senior managers continued to question the recent strategic focus and credibility of the HRF (Rees & Johari, 2010). The Senior managers afforded the new HR Director *credibility through expertise* (Wylie et al., 2014), with this most evident in collective senior manager temporal *then and now* narratives that compared the current and

previous HR Directors. At the organisational level, findings reflect far higher shared notions of strategic integration than at the unit level, and accordingly less variation.

Senior manager notions of overall organisational-HRF strategic integration (enablement) are articulated in discourse surrounding the HR Director, the attributes of the person in the role, and the power dynamic of the HRF based on who occupied the chair of the HR Director. The removal of enduring tensions (seen as being created by the former unresponsive HR Director) enabled a shift from ‘power’ to ‘service delivery’ (Ulrich, 1997). Particularly, a clear consensus of improved quality communication and responsiveness from the new HR Director was reflected in narratives among senior managers.

Former approaches that were seen as ‘troop deployments’ (Mantere & Vaara, 2008) and highly administratively focused, relied heavily on rules and regulations. However, the organisational disablement narratives at this level were more centred on power and confinement. This is interesting, because at the BU-level of analysis, an administrative approach towards HRM is not always seen as disabling, and in some cases, is articulated as strategic.

Organisational outcomes were previously constrained by the ridged approach of the former HR Director. Negotiated outcomes were embraced by the new director, while notions of collective strategic utility rested on specialised skills.

The use of *accommodative-wide rhetoric* (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010) by senior managers (organisational level of analysis) suggests that senior manager narratives framed the collective interest of the organisation above their own

individual BU situations when discussing overall organisational-HR strategic integration. The opportunity that the new specialised director brought to PSLB underlined notions of strategic utility.

6.8.3.2 Strategically placed vs strategically situated

While the importance of human capital remained uncontested throughout PSLB's change, the relevance of the HR function was contested. Despite post-GFC formal strategic frameworks placing both the previous and new HR Director within proximity to influencing strategy, my findings suggest that the credibility of the HR Director, his disposition towards change, quality of communication, and shared performative institutional logics more accurately reflect perceptions of strategic relevance and legitimacy at an aggregate organisational level.

This would accordingly reinforce Jarzabkowski and Balogun's (2009) strategic management findings that indicate that active physical inclusion within strategic planning does not necessarily deliver strategic integration. More specifically, in HRM scholarship, senior managers' need for quality communication is reflected within narratives (Rees & Johari, 2010).

6.8.3.3 Constrained through strategic tensions

The banking sector has often been described as 'shrouded in secrecy' (Rees & Johari, 2010) which attaches 'mystique' (Jenkins, 2004; Rees & Johari, 2010). My findings at the organisational level show that the institutional logics driven by the regulatory environment created an organisational structure that resulted in the 'obfuscation' (Mantere & Vaara, 2008) of what strategies were, and the rationales that guided elements of direction. Both Buller (1988) and Brandl

and Pohler (2010) found that the extent to which the CEO has developed a clear and direct strategy affects the HRF's role in strategy. My findings indicate that clarity of PSLB strategy influenced the willingness of the CEO to delegate responsibility to the HRF (Brandl & Pohler, 2010) and also suggests that the HR practitioners should be further considered.

While financial targets could be accessed by HR practitioners through ad hoc restricted and controlled processes, the HR Director was amongst the few privileged actors to be able to attach meaning to these targets (Fairclough, 2003; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). This resulted in an organisational tension when seeking to integrate the wider HRF into strategic formation.

PSLB used a structure that favoured the HR Director as the focus for "strategic HRM" while structurally precluding HR practitioners. On the one hand, the explicit strategic targets offered the mechanism for HR practitioners to make sense of strategy, and accordingly offered the ability to direct HR practitioner activity. On the other hand, HR practitioners accepted that senior management dominated strategy work, yet with some teams now participating in planning processes, I identified an illusionary collective belief (Mantere & Vaara, 2008) by HR practitioners that they are involved in strategic formulation. As such, HR practitioner utility becomes more focused on day to day activities in contributing to strategic influence.

My analysis surrounding structural participation therefore lends support to Caldwell's (2011) argument that HRM scholarship's strong disposition toward the HRF's inclusion at higher levels of formal strategic planning – particularly in the board room – needs to be considered. My research does not discount the

importance of higher level structural positioning – indeed, it supports it. But it does point to the need for fuller considerations beyond inclusion of the senior manager alone – i.e. effectively leveraging strategic influence at any appropriate level (Caldwell, 2011; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009).

Furthermore, the identification of *accommodative-wide rhetoric* (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010) by senior managers at the organisational level of analysis raises considerations for future research. Arguably, the distinct contrasts of *before* and *now* contextual situations impacted higher order responses when framing strategic integration. Put another way, the contrast between previous and current interaction with the HRF by senior managers may have impacted how strategic integration was framed. If this level of analysis were to have been studied in isolation without due contextual consideration, relevant phenomena may have been missed.

6.8.3 Business unit level analysis

The identification of *situated-narrow rhetoric* at the business unit level of analysis (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010) was reflected through senior managers framing the strategic utility of BU stakeholders more specifically in their own BU contexts. BU middle managers and line managers were also found to do this. Accordingly, this broadened the variation of notions of strategic integration at the business-unit level of analysis in a complex array of enablement and disablement of strategically relevant phenomena.

My research found that different BUs drew on different resource structures when interacting with the HRF. Most important to my findings at this level of analysis, is the sensemaking – sensegiving element of role expectations that

influences HR practitioner notions of strategy. While the level of overall interactions with BU stakeholders may be high, the HR practitioner's ability to interpret subtle strategic cues was limited when they were doing administrative work. Furthermore, BU notions of 'strategic' are not uniform, differing between units.

Subjective notions of ideal states of strategic value from the HRF do not always match prescriptive scholarship. This aligns to a contingency approach. Accordingly, the value of my findings is twofold. First, an organisation's overall disposition to strategic integration is not a mirror reflection of every BU. Second, prescriptive scholarship's elevation of formulation over implementation is not reflected in my findings as being strategically optimal to every BU. Strategic utility is enabled and disabled in daily HR roles that differ between units. Particularly, closer role expectation (BUs) and role alignments (HRF) narrated from senior managers are found in administrative and one-way linkages (Golden & Ramanujam, 1985).

HR integration with BUs that approximate two-way and integrative structures were not sought by all BU. Actualisation of this structure for one unit was reported to be delivered through the senior manager's narratives, yet not through those of middle managers. In the other case, this was not delivered. Several contextual variations found within my research explain the variations of sought and actual integration.

6.8.3.1 BU-contextual variations influencing strategic integration

Stable vs fluid context

Stable contexts were represented by smaller BU sizes, higher degrees of technical specialisation, a more confined scope of activities, close-knit within-unit actors, a narrower sense of strategic purpose, a narrower unit-leader span of control, and more unified senses of professional identity. There was also a higher prevalence for ‘insiders’ to run contextually stable BUs, while BUs with stable contexts had a higher propensity to interact with the HRF using administrative and one-way linkage structures. In contrast to this, two-way and integrative linkages were sought by BUs that were larger in size, had diverse degrees of specialisation, a broad scope of activities, spatially separated actors, and faced realities that entailed higher complexity. These had ‘outsiders’ running the units. Table 6.1 illustrates the impact of each of these contextual phenomena.

Size differences between BUs was found to influence the frequency, location and medium of interaction. As such, the frequency of HR activity was also unsurprisingly directed towards BUs that held the most personnel. Size of the BU influenced whom in the BU interacted with who in the HRF. Smaller BUs were more structurally suited to be able to circumvent process driven interaction, while frequency meant that engagement could occur more suitably with the HR Director.

Table 6.1 Stable and fluid BU characteristics

| Attribute | Stable | Fluid | Influence on HR |
|--|--|---|--|
| Size | BUs are small, with a lower frequency of interactions with the HRF. | BUs are large, and have frequent interactions internally across multiple units, as well as with the HRF. | Smaller units can interact at a senior-to-senior level only. Larger units rely on process, and interactions with the collective HRF. |
| Close-knit BU actors | A smaller size facilitates better vertical and horizontal communication. Collective sense-making occurs within these BUs. | A larger size results in spatially separated actors within the BU, and disparate enabling activities - collective sensemaking is weaker within these BUs. | Collective sensemaking affords realistic actualization of sought outcomes through HR Director contact. Weak sensemaking confines BU actors to their own ‘sandbox’ of interaction. |
| Narrow sense of strategic purpose | These BUs illustrate a collective, clear and localised understanding of a ‘way forward’ for their BUs. | There is more ambiguity associated with understanding a ‘way forward’ for these BUs. | A clear way forward facilitates one-way directed interaction. More ambiguity requires the HRF to identify and solve problems. |
| Professional identity | Strong and consistent professional identities. More professionally orientated. BUs report to be ‘special, with their own ways of doing things. | Elements of individual strong professional identities, but situated within actors with diverse identities. Broader ways of doing. | Strong and unified identities reflect a belief that the “HRF is unable to understand the BU’s business, as it is complicated for the HRF to understand. BUs with diverse identities reflect a need for the HRF to “understand our business”. In turn, seeking the HRF’s guidance. |
| Insiders and outsiders | Professional identities mitigate organisational identity. BU’s tend to draw upon developmental frames of reference. | These BUs had outsiders who actively seek adaptive processes that align to their own experiences. Actors that draw upon ‘outside’ norms stress the importance of strategy. These stem from performative logics. | Insiders have a disposition for recursive praxis. Outsiders have a higher propensity to delegitimize previous organisational practices and HR practices. These actors are prone to adaptive practices themselves in their units. Such BUs in turn seek adaptive practices from the HRF |

Stable units also had more close-knit actors that were found to be able to make sense of their own direction by being in close confines. Fluid BUs had stronger vertical structures, and restricted the way they could interact with the HRF, particularly the HR Director. One middle manager running a department in a larger BU notes:

[The HR Director] has an open-door policy, but I was told not to see him directly. It had to be routed through the secretary of my big boss (NHR-MM05).

In this instance, the participant is one of a small group of middle managers to enter the bank to introduce services that were not previously available. The warning to not engage with the HR Director had come from her staff who warned her off due to internal politics.

Stable units also had higher professional identities which accompanied narrower areas of operation. As such, operationally they had their own professional ways of doing things that, in several cases, indicate that the HRF is unable to understand them. Their own collective understanding of their roles pushed the most strategically relevant notions within their context to expeditiously hire staff. Greater facilitation of competency mapping and other value adding activities were largely not sought. Here, access to the HR Director was the most expeditious route for enablement of strategic and operational issues, and accordingly one-way integration better supported this.

Fluid-BUs were however more diverse in nature, and had less accepted professional norms in the way they do things within certain areas. Change was ongoing in these departments, and they acted fluidly as they sought growth, or were supportive of BUs that were very growth focused. Compounded with

size, messages as to how to act strategically occurred. As there were multiple interactions between internal BU actors, multiple notions of strategic support emerged. Truss et al. (2002) note that larger organisations make it difficult for the HR function to coherently act strategically. This would appear to be the case with larger BUs as well.

6.8.4.1 Discussion individual level activities and their outcomes

My analysis shows that relationship building, drawing on one's experience and skills, and knowledge sharing were central activities surrounding HRF activity. These identified activities influenced broader level outcomes that enabled or disabled BU strategic activity. In Table 6.2 I illustrate central activities (relationship building, drawing on skills and experiences, knowledge sharing) found to be done by the HR Director and HR practitioners. I report the phenomena surrounding the praxis associated with these activities, and how these actions are recursive or adaptive, with the enabling or disabling outcomes that stemmed from these activities also reported. I first discuss relationship building.

Relationship building by HR practitioners was restricted by cultural and structural boundaries that reinforced recursive ways of the past, directing their relationships toward the line. An observed variation to this was an instance where HR practitioners had collaborated with a specialist BU (on the Strategic IT initiative). In turn, the HR practitioner network resulted in adaptive praxis around assisting the BU by providing a more streamlined approach in dealing with the BU.

Table 6.2 HRF individual level activities and their outcomes

| Activity | Activity Phenomena | Recursive/Adaptive | Enable/Disable |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Relationship building | | | |
| HR Director | <p>Personal attributes of approachability and openness. Reinforces being strategically situated rather than strategically placed.</p> <p>The HR Director is only one man and can't deal with everything.</p> | <p>Adaptive praxis that entails personal orientations towards change and openness – these are highly valued.</p> <p>Recursive praxis places an onus on BU middle managers to approach the HRF.</p> | <p>Enables senior managers by way of a power shift. BUs are less constrained. Closer social ties enhance understanding and priority of HR Director activity.</p> <p>Enables Organisation-HRF coordination of higher level strategic activities.</p> |
| HR Practitioner | <p>Hierarchical culture limits access to senior managers. Strong line relationships are reinforced.</p> <p>Legacy of HR practitioner's relationships with specialist BUs middle managers largely continues</p> <p>HR practitioners embedded in collaboration formation practices build stronger relationship with collaborative BU partner.</p> | <p>Recursive praxis occurs. Cues are drawn from line managers – this is reinforced.</p> <p>Recursive praxis occurs around the centrality of the HR Director mediating strategic purpose downward to HR practitioners.</p> <p>Recursive praxis with the HR Director mediating bottom up information to the corporate centre.</p> <p>Adaptive praxis attending to communication openness with line manager issues.</p> <p>Recursive praxis by focusing on branch manager relationships and not building relationships with middle managers in specialist BUs.</p> | <p>Enables line manager activities through communication and access.</p> <p>Disables fluid business units. Places more emphasis on stable BUs to use HR practitioners in an administrative role while placing more emphasis on HR Director interactions.</p> <p>Disables aggregate sensemaking opportunities.</p> <p>Relationships that are formed by HR practitioners on projects sees flexibility outside the formal process structures being offered (fast-tracking, attention to needs) that Enables BU.</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <i>Drawing on skills and experiences</i> | | | |
| HR Director | High levels of specialised HR knowledge increase legitimacy of HRF, enabling greater opportunity for developing strategic relationships. Creates a hope for future improvement. Organisational culture and functional structure constrain upward communication | Adaptive praxis regarding BU collaboration emerges in isolated situated contexts. Recursive praxis for dealing with specialist BUs. | Enables training practices to meet broader strategic alignment and direction of PSLB. |
| HR Practitioner | Knowledge and experience shape identity. HR practitioners with stronger ‘banker identities’ draw from their own experiences of the past to define HRF contributions. HR practitioners with stronger ‘HR specialist’ identities draw from their previous experiences, using sources of reference from outside of PSLB. | Recursive praxis of drawing from one’s past. Ambiguity remains for HR practitioners around what BU specialist units do. Recursive praxis reinforces HR practitioners addressing problems that are understood. Tensions emerge over what should be done – differences are aligned along HR practitioner identity constructs. Recursive organisational and HRF structure mediates identity tensions. | Enables a focus on implementation and delivery, i.e. training Disables HR practitioner – BU problem solving. |
| <i>Knowledge sharing</i> | | | |
| HR Director | HR Director a highly experienced specialist. HR Director can receive and pass on organisational knowledge from corporate centre. Organisational culture and structure result in vertical knowledge sharing being mediated by HRF. | Adaptive insights gained from HR Director’s relationships with senior managers Recursive knowledge sharing practices where the HR Director is mediating knowledge transfer. | Enables HR Director HR practitioner learning experiences Enables greater HRF legitimacy |

| | | | |
|------------------------|---|--|--|
| <p>HR Practitioner</p> | <p>Different HR practitioner identity constructs offer an opportunity for unique collective problem solving.</p> <p>HRF Inter-team knowledge sharing is however limited, despite proximity. Functionally specific units further reduce knowledge sharing.</p> | <p>Recursive praxis of HR Director mediating inter-team knowledge.</p> <p>Recursive praxis observed with HR practitioners staying in one’s own team.</p> | <p>Disables HRF collective problem solving.</p> <p>Disables understanding of broader contextual perspectives.</p> <p>Disables bottom up strategic input</p> <p>Enables Top down implemented of HR structures</p> <p>Disables agency of HR practitioners to formulate strategy and places a focus on implementation.</p> |
|------------------------|---|--|--|

In aggregate however, while strong line relationships resulted in positive outcomes for line managers, and the HR Director's relationship activities improved senior level interactions, the ability to connect these two potentially strong relationship positions required the HR Director to mediate top-down and bottom-up feedback. This demised the overall strategic integration of the HRF, partially because of functional structures within PSLB, and in particular low observed levels of inter-team coordination. Ambrosini et al. (2007) presented the benefits of high level inter-team coordination activities in achieving competitive advantage.

One middle manager comments on the overall issue of functional silos within the bank disabling activity – as articulated in the narrative below.

[T]hat's a cultural issue we have in the bank. People don't share knowledge, have cross functional teams formed and all (NHR-MM14).

In periods of observation within the HRF, I also observed limited inter-team coordination. There were regular interactions between the HR Director and individual HR practitioners, however there was an absence of HR practitioners (team leaders) coordinating activities between themselves. There was only one formal team leader meeting occurring each month; this largely discussed operational issues.

This inter-team coordination is also central to activities drawing on previous experiences and skills, as well as knowledge sharing activities. In both these cases, my findings demonstrate that while sensemaking occurred within different situated contexts, the ability to bring together these ideas into a

collective forum and create better HRF collective sense of organisational dynamics was missing.

Furthermore, drawing on skills and experience activities, and knowledge sharing activities, was the absence of a means to deal with specialised BUs. Recursive relationship structures of the past had detached the HRF from specialist units, while there was collectively a limited skill and experience base from which to sense of specialist unit issues. These elements all appear to have a significant influence on the ability of the collective HRF to deal with specialist business units. As such, overall strategically aligned linkages were diminished.

Summary of chapter 6

This chapter has characterised how strategic integration occurs between HR practitioners within PSLB, while also reporting the factors that influence strategic integration. First, my findings showed that desired states of HRF-BU partnership linkages vary between BUs. I also report that ideal and experienced partnership linkages were also found to differ between BUs. Proactive and reactive interactions were a central category to emerge between ideal and experienced orientations of linkage.

Second, this chapter reported how HR practitioners collaborated with BUs. Because of the different ideal HRF-BU linkages being narrated by senior managers, my analysis of collaboration activities found that the categories of formation, organising and control practices better captured collaborations between BUs and the HRF. I find that factors that influence strategic integration entail a complex web of factors that occurred over time and levels

within PSLB. I therefore used a framework developed by Renkema et al. (2016) to report extra-organisation, temporal and multi-level dynamics that were all found to influence the HRF level of strategic integration within PSLB. Central to these dynamics are the HR Director's disposition towards change, structural dynamics that resulted in the high levels of HR Director strategic interaction but low level of HR practitioner interaction, and HRF inter-team coordination activities that influenced strategic integration.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes my research and thesis. In this chapter I provide a summary of my thesis (7.2) to discuss the empirical and theoretical contributions that my research has made. In sections 7.3 and 7.4, I detail how both a single case approach (7.3) and a multi-level analysis (7.4) methodological framework have achieved the contributions I argued were possible when locating my thesis (Chapter 1.3). My proposed contributions were intended to address the need for HRM strategic integration literature to attend to strategic ambiguity, to planned and implemented strategy, and actor agency. Following my discussion of the empirical and theoretical contributions, I then provide the contributions my research has made to practice (7.5), SAP and HR role theory insights (7.6), the limitations of my research (7.7), and avenues of enquiry that potentially warrant further investigation (7.8). Lastly, in section 7.9 I provide my final conclusion.

7.2 Summary of thesis

To better understand what *being more strategic* means for HR practitioners, my research investigated the situated practices and praxis that HR practitioners drew upon and created in their daily roles. My research was conducted within a commercial bank in Sri Lanka over a period of six weeks. I used interview narratives, observation and organisational documentation to capture manager (senior, middle and line) and employee perspectives on strategically relevant phenomena that surrounded the human resource

function. These were then compared against the activities and actions of the HRF.

There is a base of research literature arguing for the importance of the HRF to make strategic contributions to organisations (Ho & Teo, 2015; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009; Lepak et al., 2006), and a body of scholarship that has subsequently argued that such strategic contributions have had little impact on changes to HR practice (e.g. Ho & Teo, 2015; Kaufman, 2012; Yeung, 2011). My research sought to better understand HR practitioners' strategic actions within this dynamic. To do so, I went behind the 'veil' of HRM practices (Boxall, 2014), to explore how and why HRM strategic activity occurs with organisational stakeholders. Specifically, my attention was focused on addressing gaps identified in the literature surrounding not only the HRF's overt and formal contributions to strategy, but also where and how daily situated activities of HR practitioners occurred around strategically relevant organisational issues.

Accordingly, my research was guided by three research questions:

RQ.1: How strategic are HR practitioners in the development and implementation of practices across different business units?

RQ.2a: How does strategic integration occur between HR practitioners and business units?

RQ.2b: What factors affect strategic integration between HR practitioners and business units?

Within my literature review, I detailed arguments that HRM strategic partnerships are often a moving target for HR practitioners. That is, the strategic expectations placed upon the HRF are often inconsistent. My review discussed the contextual variations that organisational stakeholders may face, and discussed the difficulty and tensions that HR practitioners may deal with in accommodating an array of demands from different organisational actors. I discussed scholarship that argued that strategic ambiguity has a role in how strategy is consumed and enacted, and as such, the inattention to actor agency and within-firm variability requires redress.

To address gaps outlined in my literature review, I utilised an SAP perspective to obtain a finer grained understanding of the dynamics of strategic interactions between the HRF and organisational stakeholders. Such an approach therefore also makes an early contribution to the HRM-as-practice agenda that has recently emerged (Björkman et al., 2014). Contrary to the traditional view of strategic management scholarship that treats strategy as the property of an organisation, SAP maintains that strategy should be considered as *something people do* (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). Such a perspective enabled my research to analyse the different practitioners of strategy across the organisation, and the practices and praxis those actors utilised.

Furthermore, using a subjectivist epistemology aligned to SAP, I could investigate strategic activity from the perspectives of different organisational actors within the same firm. “As strategically relevant storytelling may exist at multiple levels” there is a need to understand if narratives depicting strategic

relevance occur in other places, or at different times (Fenton & Langley, 2011, p. 1178). Accordingly, participant narratives identified strategically relevant issues within their own situated context. Such an approach enabled enquiry into arguments that organisations may not be nearly as homogeneous as they are often reported to be (Colakoglu, Lepak, & Hong, 2006). My research approach also supported the investigation into the variability of actions occurring between HR practitioners themselves, HR practitioners and different organisational units (BUs), and HR practitioners and different levels of actors (senior, middle and line managers). Through my methodological approach, my research has contributed to both theory and practice.

7.3 Empirical and theoretical contributions stemming from a qualitative single case approach

This section discusses how my qualitative single case approach has resulted in contributions to different veins of literature surrounding the HRF acting strategically. I first discuss my contributions to scholarship in relation to calls for a better understanding of the working lives of HR practitioner (7.2.1). I then discuss my contributions towards notions of what being strategic means (7.2.2) before finally showing the contributions my research has made towards addressing contextual factors (7.2.3).

7.3.1 Working lives of HR practitioners

My qualitative inquiry within a single case setting has contributed to a small but growing body of literature that seeks to capture the working lives of HR practitioners (Glover & Butler, 2012). My use of a single case setting has highlighted the role enactment of HR practitioners across a single

organisation. My research has therefore been able to offer insights into how HRF actors' cognitive framing and actions towards role typologies enable or disable organisational stakeholders.

Addressing 'how' strategic are HR practitioners in the development and implementation of practices (RQ.1), my findings indicate that the HR practitioner roles of change agent, employee champion and administrative expert are all strategically relevant to organisational actors. Particularly, the specialist identity of the HR Director and his disposition towards change and performance are largely seen as a critical strategic junction for the bank by senior and middle managers. The board-appointed HR Director demonstrated little ambiguity regarding the purpose of his role or the strategic direction of the bank, which seemed to provide agency for the HR Director to pursue an HRM agenda that positively influenced the HRF as being seen by senior and middle managers as 'more strategic'.

HR practitioners as whole however, showed limited engagement in formal strategic structures. Despite HR practitioners' own positive framings of being strategic, ambiguity around the overall strategic direction of PSLB limited their roles as change agents, and hindered their development of HR practices. Rather, they used their close interactions with line management to direct their agency towards helping and facilitating those working on the line. Such activity met the strategic expectations of line managers, yet often not those within middle management and senior management.

My research has also extended previous research (e.g. Welch and Welch (2012)) by including in the analysis the dynamics between the HR Director

and HR professionals. Inclusion of the dynamics between the HRF director and HR practitioners, as well as between different HR practitioners, extends previous research by directly addressing the differences between individual HR practitioners and the HR director in their role enactment while also accounting for their role variation within a single organisation. I have also attended to the under-emphasised temporal elements of role enactment (Welch and Welch, 2012) by reporting how phenomena relevant to HRM evolved over time. Furthermore, my research has extended the contributions of Glover and Butler (2012) by creating an improved understanding of what 'HR practitioners actually do'. My research has provided a rich description of the practices and praxis used by HR practitioners in a single organisation as they enact their roles.

My research illustrated instances where groupings of BU senior managers held similar ideals around what strategic activity from the HRF should entail, yet they experienced collaboration and interaction with the HRF in different ways (both positively and negatively perceived). Similarly, by reporting the praxis and practices used in HRF-BU interactions, my research began to unpack the importance of situated context for HR practitioners. From this, I have contributed to scholarship by offering insights into some of the contextual dynamics that drive variations of practice and praxis. I.e., not only focusing on what HR practitioners 'actually' do, but the identity structures and sensemaking frameworks that drove HR practices and praxis.

Similarly, in addressing how strategic integration occurs between HR practitioners and BUs (RQ. 2a), a single case qualitative approach has enabled

the exploration of HR practices that occur within different strategic integrative frameworks. My research thus adds to the stream of integrative theory founded by Golden and Ramanujam (1985) by detailing what is actually done by HR practitioners in different BU-HRF integrative frameworks within my case organisation. This advances the limited volume of scholarship that focused on *how* integrations occur across multiple organisations (e.g. Sarvaiya et al., 2015). I extend these efforts to show not only that different BU-HRF partnership linkages occur within a single organisation, but how activities occur within these linkages.

My findings have also provided a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of actor organisational realities (Björkman et al., 2014). Specifically, my single case approach has contributed towards better understanding how the working lives of the HRF's business partners (business units) impact the integrative frameworks sought from the HRF function. My theoretical contribution has therefore been to detail the characteristics which drive one-way and two-way integrative partnerships within this organisation. In contrast to other scholarship that predominately classifies what integrative framework occurs between the HRF and BU, I have shown that the working lives of BU partners influence situated practices, and accordingly, HRF-BU strategic integration dynamic (RQ. 2b). While other researchers show that within different categories, employees diverge within single organisations (Huselid et al., 2005; Lepak & Snell, 1999b), my research accounts for the day-to-day HR practitioner strategic and operational interactions around these differences.

7.3.2 Expanding the notion of practices

Aligned to SAP, my research has gone beyond the narrower definitions of practices typically used within HRM, to treating *practices* as ways of doing (Björkman et al., 2014). My research identified formation, organisational and control practices (Mantere, 2005) that explained HR practitioners' integration with BUs (RQ. 2a). Here, a significant contribution of my work has been to find that while strategic activity from the HR director occurs within formal strategic processes (Boxall & Purcell, 2008), HR practitioners conceive notions of strategy in their daily administrative work through sensemaking, and employ their agency along these lines to contribute to organisational outcomes in a manner that they perceive is strategic. Accordingly, the identification of activities carried out by HR practitioners also adds to theoretical positions of the resource-based view of the firm by illustrating how HR activities either enabled or disabled various BUs.

The resource-based view of the firm has offered utility towards unpacking some of the micro activities that could underpin competitive advantage within this case study. The utilisation of an enabling and disabling framework has offered additional clarity into not only how capabilities and resources influence praxis, but also how praxis influences resources and capabilities (Regnér, 2015). While much potential remains in this space, my research did not extensively draw upon the resource-based view of the firm. The utilisation of the resource-based view within a HRM-as-practice lens however offers fruitful avenues for future enquiry.

7.3.3 Contextual factors

My research has also contributed to the scholarship arguing for the importance of the contextual nature of HRM (Hendry et al., 2010; Jackson et al., 2014).

My single case approach highlighted the impact of extra-organisational factors (Renkema et al., 2016) that influence organisational structure, business units and human resource practitioners. These contextual factors contributed to how HR practitioners undertook strategic role enactment (RQ. 1), and influenced the dynamics of HRF-BU integration (RQ. 2b). Furthermore, my research investigated the different strategic expectations of BUs, aligning these to how HR practitioners enacted their roles. Central to my findings is the contingent nature of the context of the various BUs. My findings indicate that there is significant variance amongst the expectations surrounding the way HR practitioners should interact with different BUs.

Collective cognition is embedded in the activities of practitioners (Johnson et al., 2003a; Weick & Roberts, 1993), and my research has advanced understandings of the relationship between HR practitioners' cognition and their strategic activity. Particularly, within my case study, when HR practitioners desire to contribute to organisational change, yet are not placed within strategic frameworks, their cognition of strategic contribution is dependent on their previous backgrounds and day to day experiences through sensemaking. Identity structures were found to be influential within this dynamic, and accordingly, I have contributed to the literature that has used identity to understand HR practitioners 'becoming' strategic (Pritchard, 2010). My contribution to this scholarship has not only shown that banker versus HR

specialist identity tensions existed within PSLB, but that these identity constructs had a part in mediating HR practitioner activities and actions.

Furthermore, where the HR function is itself partitioned into functional structures where training, transfers, etc., all occur separately, the collective cognition of the HRF is constrained to an understanding of their roles within their own functional confines. My research identified limited opportunities for HR practitioners to share their experiences with other HRF teams, despite occupying close spaces. In knowledge sharing research, Marin et al. (2016) identified close proximity and the sharing of problems as factors that facilitated knowledge sharing and problem solving between similar actors with similar professional backgrounds.

In my research, physical proximity was not an issue, yet joint problem solving was limited. HR practitioners with stronger banker identities choose to focus on external cues within formal and informal settings (e.g. daily work interactions and lunchrooms) rather than collectively sharing and resolving problems with their HR colleagues. This reduced HR practitioners' dispositions towards the creation of HR practices, and instead placed them in more of an implementation role. Likewise, HR practitioners with stronger HR identities drew on external normative cues of what being strategic should entail. This resulted in a greater propensity to communicate strategic intent by HR practitioners towards the line. However, it is the absence of collective problem-solving that constrained the aggregate HR function. As such, a disabling element of the HRF achieving greater strategic integration was inhibited by limited inter-team coordination. This would affirm the importance

of inter-team coordination shown by Ambrosini et al. (2007) to result in competitive advantage.

My research illuminated the importance of collective problem-solving within this case setting, by further affirming SAP arguments that strategizing can occur in many locations within an organisation, rather than solely within the realm of senior managers. Of importance however is the need for the HRF to not only be HR specialists, but also specialists of their organisation (Catley, Blackwood, Forsyth, Tappin, & Bentley, 2017). The absence of strong inter-group communication and coordination hindered collective sensemaking around how different BUs conceive strategic activity, and how practice and praxis requirements vary. Collective problem solving could enable stakeholder mapping, and allow for a better understanding of how to better align the HRF to BUs' uniquely contextual strategic requirements. The often-unclear demarcation of strategic vs operational activity further highlights the importance of communication and collective problem solving if the HRF is to become 'more strategic'.

My findings also support the assertion that the reception of an HR practitioner's change agent style is dependent on context (Wylie et al., 2014). I support this position by showing that context is relevant not only across organisational settings, but also within BU settings where context differs between units. HRM scholarship has illustrated the propensity for change agent roles to vary based on industry contexts, or across organisational characteristics, but has paid little attention to the styles and approaches aligned to the differing contexts of within-firm settings.

7.4 Multiple levels of analysis

Multi-level analysis scholarship highlights the dangers of ignoring the within-firm practices of HRM. Such scholarship argues that SHRM research has essentially done this, with scholars noting the increased likelihood of misleading results being produced (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Renkema et al., 2016; Woodrow & Guest, 2014; Wright & Nishii, 2013). By providing a multi-level analysis, my work contributes to scholarship by reporting different notions of what the HRF 'being strategic' meant for different actor categories.

Although the identification of HRF-BU partnership linkages occurring across firms has been used in several studies to illustrate HR performance outcomes, these have largely been aggregated to develop organisational level HR-BU integrative linkages. My research contributes to previous integrative theory scholarship by reporting how the HRF works with different BUs. Particularly, this extends previous scholarship that has reported organisational aggregate/organisational partnership linkages with the HRF. A contribution my research makes is illustrating the dangers of treating BUs as homogeneous. The variations, ideals and experienced interactions occurring with the HRF were extensive. Despite wide spread acceptance that within firm variations exist, empirically there has been little work that has investigated within-firm integrative variations, and how such variations affect performance outcomes. A key contribution of my research is that variability between BUs is not only evident, but should be embraced due to the unique contextual differences that see the same HR practice enable one BU yet disable or not impact another.

Across many vertical and horizontal locations of my case, organisational realities do not create anything approximating a one size fits all approach.

7.5 Contributions to practice

For HR practitioners and organisational executives, my thesis was designed with the intention of addressing the reoccurring discourse of the HRF needing to become more strategic, yet largely failing to do so. Insights into actor-centric positions that enable or disable organisational performance outcomes are likely to be highly relevant to such an audience given the frequency of this topic. My findings avoid the high degree of abstraction associated with quantitative analysis, which does little to inform HR managers and HRF's business partners as to how they could employ and utilise these variables for positive outcomes (Ambrosini et al., 2007).

My research therefore offers insights into organisations where there are the beginnings of structural positioning to advance the HRF's strategic role, yet where difficulties pertaining to its realisation exist. Organisational practitioners may consider the areas HR practitioners engage in, and view these as locations where sensemaking cues are influential in shaping activity. Practitioners should therefore consider the implications of HR inter-team coordination to ensure that collective sensemaking opportunities are available for HR practitioners to reconcile what is understood to be strategic from across different parts of an organisation.

Improved communication between the HRF and organisational stakeholders within banking has been identified as a requirement for greater HRF strategic

focus (Rees & Johari, 2010). Extending these insights, my findings indicate that the types of communication that are seen to enable strategic utility differ between diverse BUs. Despite strong formal communication structures being reported between the HR Director and BU heads, the quality of HRF-BU interactions varied. Practitioners should understand that in absence of communication, HR practitioners draw sense from where they can. This can work against the articulated desire to strategically position the function.

7.6 SAP and HR role theory insights

My research has been informed by both HR role theory and SAP scholarship. Particularly, empirically bringing these together under the HRM-as-practice framework has enabled “attention from relatively static role typologies to [move towards] a more dynamic perspective of HR work” (Björkman et al., 2014, p. 193). Accordingly, it is advantageous to provide insights that stemmed from the use of SAP and HR role theory within my research, and the implications these may have on future scholarship.

As already discussed, my research identified that BUs seek to be served in different ways by their HRF partners. Particularly, a SAP lens enabled the identification of various forms of practices and praxis (sought and enacted) as HR practitioners partnered with different BUs. HR role theory enabled a well-established role framework to locate these activities. Accordingly, my research identified that under different role typologies, strategy is conceived in different ways, as are the actions that constitute ‘being strategic’. The complementary effect of using both SAP and HR role theory together has

therefore offered considerable utility, and should be considered in future scholarship.

In this respect, the use of SAP's typology of practitioner and practices (Figure 2.2) was a framework that enabled the identification of where and how subgroups of HR practitioners varied in cognition, identity and role enactment. HR role theory has been valuable at aggregating the actions of the collective HRF, but a weakness within this body of scholarship has been addressing the variation of activities by individual HR practitioners with different intra and extra-group actors. A key implication informed from this is the need for future scholarship to pay more attention to both the aggregate HRF, as well as individual HR practitioners. Most significantly, the use of HR manager perspectives alone to represent the actions of the HRF may not offer an accurate picture of strategic integration. Furthermore, HR practitioners themselves should not be considered as homogeneous.

Professional identity and ambiguity impact how HR practitioners understand and influence strategy. SAP scholarship played a significant role towards my research illuminating strategic ambiguity dynamics, and the sensemaking process surrounding this. The Implication for future scholarship is the need to account for different HR practitioner identities as they undertake their daily activities, and more specifically the importance of how they make sense of their roles, and the expectations of those they interact with. In my case setting, these interactions had a reflexive effect on identity and sensemaking, and HR scholarship could benefit from paying more consideration to these dynamics.

7.7 Limitations

Notwithstanding my research contributions to theory and practice, there are limitations within my work that need to be highlighted. First, this was an exploratory study that was undertaken using a single case study design. While the merits of using this approach have been discussed as well-aligned to my research's purpose, the degree of transferability (Fusch & Ness, 2015) of my findings from a bank setting should be considered. There has, however, been a significant amount of highly cited HR scholarship attending to HRM strategic roles conducted within the banking sector (e.g. Hope-Hailey et al., 1997; Pritchard, 2010; Rees & Johari, 2010). This would suggest that the banking sector does provide a setting conducive to producing insights relevant to other industry sectors. Furthermore, my findings may have applicability in large and complex organisational settings where HR practitioners are dealing with multiple business units, and/or organisational change. In this regard, the applicability of my findings may more suitably be determined by the reader as to whether or not the transferability of my single case findings can apply to other contextual settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, while my research setting answers calls from within the HRM literature to extend SHRM research beyond Anglo-Saxon settings (Brandl & Pohler, 2010) and to investigate HRM in Asia using practitioner-focused approaches (Rees & Johari, 2010), my country setting must also be considered when interpreting my findings. This concern is somewhat mitigated by my inclusion of national culture within my contextual analysis. However, there remains latitude for other country specific elements to influence my findings in a manner that I have not addressed and which may not be found within Western settings.

Further to this, I was a researcher conducting my data collection in a foreign setting. Thus, there may have been sensory cues in practitioner responses that I may not have been able to pick up.

Third, I was unable to include the perspectives of the CEO in my research. This has limited my research in the respect that I was unable to directly capture constraining elements placed upon the CEO that could then enable or confine the HRF's strategic role in my case study (e.g. Brandl & Pohler, 2010). While data from other senior managers has mitigated this weakness, access to the CEO would have been preferable.

Fourth, while this research has included temporal elements in its analysis, the relatively short tenure of the new HR Director has limited my research's ability to account for changes that may have been forthcoming. Truss (2003) argues that some of the evidence needed to understand if the HRF is performing a strategic role includes the capacity to analyse HRM over time (Purcell, 2001). The time constraints of doing a PhD did not allow for two onsite visits. Doing so however, may have offered the ability to better capture how the distinct differences between the previous and new HR Director manifested in new ways of doing and thinking for HR practitioners. Equally, with more time, it is conceivable that BU-HRF integration structures may have changed as the HR Director had more time to address localised BU concerns. While this was an issue largely outside of my control, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that a relatively short period of time had been afforded to the HR Director to instigate significant change.

Single researcher bias could not be avoided in this study. As elements of data collection and analysis were done by one person, biases may have arisen in my analysis. Elements that mitigated this limitation were the recording of interviews, using Nvivo software to facilitate structure, and the triangulation of documents.

Finally, the number of participants interviewed at the employee level of analysis did not allow me to achieve theoretical saturation at this level. While other units of analysis had senior, middle and line managers matched to their BU, the sheer number of interviews required to do this for employees was beyond my available resources. Accordingly, there may be other explanatory factors beyond those reported at this level of analysis.

7.8 Suggestions for future research

My research would suggest that future opportunities exist in exploring factors that explain variations of strategic linkages (e.g. Golden & Ramanujam, 1985) within single organisational settings. First, it would be of use to further pursue an understanding of the fluid and dynamic framework that I identified as a factor in explaining differences between the HRF and BUs' integrative partnerships. I would encourage ethnographic research that entails the researcher not only embedding themselves within the HRF, but also within BUs where initial variations of integrative relationships are identified. Gaining a deeper understanding of BU professional identities, operating environments and internal sensemaking structures presents an opportunity to better understand the framework I presented.

Additionally, the opportunity to further explore HR practitioner's praxis around the creation and implementation of clearly defined organisational wide change initiative exists. The variations of praxis between two business units with similar expectations and priorities suggest the potential for other variations to exist. Confining exploration to a single initiative across a single organisation may enable greater insights into how variations can occur. The broader exploratory nature of my research restricted further enquiry into this idiosyncrasy yet, it opens up interesting possibilities for future research. Rees and Johari (2010) have explored the perceptions of the HRF when an organisation is undertaking a change initiative, yet attention to the dynamics of a particular initiative, as done so by Woodrow and Guest (2014) would be an interesting avenue of research.

7.9 Final conclusion

My research aimed to understand ambiguities within the literature around the extent HR practitioners can make a strategic contribution. I conclude from my research that a complex range of interconnections between external and internal contextual factors contribute to determining if HR practitioners can make a strategic contribution in my case organisation. This contrasts with most research accounts which have paid attention to individual units of analysis, while not accounting for time.

A strategy-as-practice approach using multi-level analysis was undertaken to understand how HR practitioners carry out strategic activities, and how integrated they were with BUs within a single case organisation. This enabled the identification of extra-organisational influences that resulted in an internal

environment that enabled the HR Director to pursue strategic HRM initiatives, but largely hindered HR practitioner activities. Extra-organisational factors are seen to influence internal strategic planning structures, and accordingly HR practitioner access to higher level interpretive structures from which to make sense of strategic direction. This created an environment where HR practitioners did not engage significantly in the development of strategies or practices. Rather, they predominately drew on interpretive frameworks available to them to assert strategic agency towards what the literature would define as administrative work.

These frameworks predominately include sensemaking from interactions with line managers. This enabled front line activities but did not tend to enable middle and senior manager strategic activities. Additionally, it was found that where two-way integration was either sought or occurring with BUs, HR practitioners were not largely involved. Where weaker strategic structures were occurring (administrative and one-way integration), these largely occurred through the HR Director. The contextual environments of different BUs also played a significant role in mediating HRF-BU integrative frameworks.

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APPENDIX A: Participant Interview Information

| <i>Non-Human Resource Function Senior Managers</i> | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Participant ID | NHR-SM01 | Participant ID | NHR-SM02 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 2 | Number of interviews | 2 |
| Total interview duration | 99.7 Minutes | Total interview duration | 80.9 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 8249 | Total Interview word count | 6977 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-SM03 | Participant ID | NHR-SM04 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 2 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 92.6 Minutes | Total interview duration | 54.7 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 7406 | Total Interview word count | 4773 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-SM05 | Participant ID | NHR-SM06 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 44.1 Minutes | Total interview duration | 64.4 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3451 | Total Interview word count | 5312 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-SM07 | Participant ID | NHR-SM08 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 53.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 80.5 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3757 | Total Interview word count | 6350 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-SM09 | Participant ID | NHR-SM10 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 67.7 Minutes | Total interview duration | 44.5 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 5458 | Total Interview word count | 3378 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-SM11 | Participant ID | NHR-SM12 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 45.3 Minutes | Total interview duration | 63.8 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3553 | Total Interview word count | 5064 |
| | | | |
| <i>Non-Human Resource Function Middle Managers</i> | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM01 | Participant ID | NHR-MM02 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 67.1 Minutes | Total interview duration | 47.1 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 5960 | Total Interview word count | 4534 |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Participant ID | NHR-MM03 | Participant ID | NHR-MM04 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 68.8 Minutes | Total interview duration | 54.5 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 6105 | Total Interview word count | 4584 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM05 | Participant ID | NHR-MM06 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 47.9 Minutes | Total interview duration | 55.8 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3259 | Total Interview word count | 4584 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM07 | Participant ID | NHR-MM08 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 37.8 Minutes | Total interview duration | 25.9 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3318 | Total Interview word count | 2280 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM09 | Participant ID | NHR-MM10 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 37.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 61.3 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 2878 | Total Interview word count | 4823 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM11 | Participant ID | NHR-MM12 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 39.7 Minutes | Total interview duration | 57.3 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3691 | Total Interview word count | 4165 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM13 | Participant ID | NHR-MM14 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 2 | Number of interviews | 2 |
| Total interview duration | 72.7 Minutes | Total interview duration | 79.7 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 5313 | Total Interview word count | 6508 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM15 | Participant ID | NHR-MM16 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 30.6 Minutes | Total interview duration | 46.2 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 2579 | Total Interview word count | 4118 |
| Participant ID | NHR-MM17 | | |
| Gender | Female | | |
| Number of interviews | 1 | | |
| Total interview duration | 55.7 Minutes | | |
| Total Interview word count | 4108 | | |

| Non-Human Resource Function Branch Managers (Line Managers) | | | |
|--|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Participant ID | NHR-LM01 | Participant ID | NHR-LM02 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 64.4 Minutes | Total interview duration | 57.8 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 4605 | Total Interview word count | 5098 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-LM03 | Participant ID | NHR-LM04 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 55.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 64.2 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 4670 | Total Interview word count | 5348 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-LM05 | Participant ID | NHR-LM06 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 61.8 Minutes | Total interview duration | 70.4 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 4574 | Total Interview word count | 5985 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | NHR-LM07 | Participant ID | NHR-LM08 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 45.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 39.4 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3387 | Total Interview word count | 3445 |
| | | | |
| Non-Human Resource Function Employees | | | |
| Participant ID | EMP-01 | Participant ID | EMP-02 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 62.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 67.6 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 4898 | Total Interview word count | 5695 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | EMP-03 | Participant ID | EMP-04 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 54.9 Minutes | Total interview duration | 61.3 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 4870 | Total Interview word count | 4749 |
| | | | |
| Participant ID | EMP-05 | Participant ID | EMP-06 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 67.8 Minutes | Total interview duration | 40 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 5112 | Total Interview word count | Not recorded |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Participant ID | EMP-07 | Participant ID | EMP-08 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 33.9 Minutes | Total interview duration | 30 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 3002 | Total Interview word count | Not recorded |
| Human Resource Function Senior Manager | | | |
| Participant ID | HR-SM | | |
| Gender | Male | | |
| Number of interviews | 2 | | |
| Total interview duration | 132.7 Minutes | | |
| Total Interview word count | 10509 | | |
| Human Resource Function Practitioners (HR Practitioners) | | | |
| Participant ID | HR-PR01 | Participant ID | HR-PR02 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 1 |
| Total interview duration | 67.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 68.3 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 5605 | Total Interview word count | 5427 |
| Participant ID | HR-PR03 | Participant ID | HR-PR04 |
| Gender | Female | Gender | Male |
| Number of interviews | 2 | Number of interviews | 2 |
| Total interview duration | 82.2 Minutes | Total interview duration | 79.8 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 7073 | Total Interview word count | 6237 |
| Participant ID | HR-PR05 | Participant ID | HR-PR06 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 2 | Number of interviews | 2 |
| Total interview duration | 125.8 Minutes | Total interview duration | 110.3 |
| Total Interview word count | 9718 | Total Interview word count | 9171 |
| Participant ID | HR-PR07 | Participant ID | HR-PR08 |
| Gender | Male | Gender | Female |
| Number of interviews | 1 | Number of interviews | 2 |
| Total interview duration | 71.5 Minutes | Total interview duration | 80.5 Minutes |
| Total Interview word count | 6308 | Total Interview word count | 7339 |
| Participant ID | HR-PR09 | | |
| Gender | Female | | |
| Number of interviews | 2 | | |
| Total interview duration | 85.4 | | |
| Total Interview word count | 6982 | | |

APPENDIX B: Participant information sheet



INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of project

The strategic role of HRM in a Sri Lankan bank

An invitation

My Name is Jason Cordier. I am inviting you to participate in a research project entitled '*The strategic role of HRM in a Sri Lankan bank*.' The project is undertaken as part of my doctoral studies, which seeks to better understand the strategic elements of HRM in Sri Lanka, and the role HRM plays strategically. [REDACTED] has graciously allowed me to conduct my research within its organization.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand what the HR function does every day in 'being strategic.' The research will be used for my PhD thesis and for academic publication. [REDACTED] will receive an overview of my findings.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Within Seylan Bank, a broad array of stakeholders have been invited to participate. These include the members of the HR function, executive and senior managers, line managers and employees.

- Participants are contacted through [REDACTED].
- No compensation or reimbursements will be given for participation of this study.
- There will be NO discomforts or risks to participants.
- Participants who wish will receive a summary of the findings and a copy of the white paper.

Project Procedures

- You will be asked to provide responses to largely open ended questions.
- The interview will be expected to be no more than 45 minutes, with a shorter duration that fits the participant's available time schedule.

Data Management

- Data obtained in this interview will be used in the publication of a PhD and research papers.
- Confidentiality will be preserved, with any content of your answers remaining anonymous and unidentifiable to everyone except the research team. Neither you, nor your organization will be identifiable in any publications, nor will views or interviews be made available to [REDACTED].
- All original data will be held securely for a 5 year period, and may be used in this time in a number of other academic publications. Anonymity will remain and after this period the interviews will be destroyed.

APPENDIX C: Participant consent form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
KAUAPAPA WHAI PA KŪRI

Research Project: The strategic role of HRM in a Sri Lankan bank

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me

agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Full Name - printed

[Redacted Name]

Signature:

[Redacted Signature]

Date:

19th Feb 2016

APPENDIX D: Low risk ethics notification

HoU Review Group

Ethics Notification Number: 4000015048

Title: What does 'being strategic' mean for HRM? Contrasting Perspectives between HRM personnel and broader management

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please log on to <http://rims.massey.ac.nz> and register the changes in order that they be assessed as safe to proceed.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Dr Brian Finch, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish require evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again answering yes to the publication question to provide more information to go before one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

You are reminded that staff researchers and supervisors are fully responsible for ensuring that the information in the low risk notification has met the requirements and guidelines for submission of a low risk notification.

If you wish to print an official copy of this letter, please login to the RIMS system, and under the Reporting section, View Reports you will find a link to run the LR Report.

Yours sincerely