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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Production and Reproduction of Layoffs Discourse in Swedish Newspapers



Master Thesis in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labor Relations

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Author: Rabeah Al Hassan

Supervisor: Dr. Rebecka Arman

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ABSTRACT:

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Aim: This is a scientific report that aims at examining how the discourse of layoffs is constituted and depicted in news texts, and specifically how they reflect on and represent the layoff phenomenon in the Swedish context by drawing on the critical discourse analysis (CDA). Moreover, the thesis also analyzes and describes how the selected newspapers’ discourses illustrate and reflect on the role of Human Resource Management in dealing with layoff processes. The study concentrated on the framings, justifications, evaluations and legitimizations processes in two well-known Swedish newspapers in their coverage of the layoff events in three large organizations in Sweden during 2012.

Theory: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the theoretical framework of this study. The main theoretical concepts that are used for the purpose of this thesis are: discourse and discursive practice and interpretation.

Method: A critical discourse analysis was conducted for 40 news articles that included a discursive textual and inter-textual analysis and micro-level linguistic analysis as well.

Findings: The analysis resulted in revealing three main discourse types; *rationalistic*, *humanistic* and *nationalistic*, which their characteristics were described and discussed elaborately. Moreover, the analysis revealed the domination of the rationalistic discourse and that the other two discourses are subordinated to it. This highlighted the news texts justification of layoffs practice and the legitimization of the management action. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that Swedish newspapers represented the role of HRM in handling layoffs practice within a narrow scope that related only to the implementation of the organizations’ financial strategy, while it overlooked the role of HRM in dealing with the employees questions during layoff processes.

Keywords: Layoffs; discourse; news texts; Sweden; justification; legitimization

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1. Introduction

Layoffs is a term that is being used to identify employee displacement and could be used interchangeably with employee downsizing which can be considered as synonymous with it (Wayhan & Werner, 2000). Recently, coinciding with the last recession in 2008 mass layoffs events throughout the world have been witnessed (Datta et al, 2009). During this period layoffs and employee downsizing waves have been part of the management practices and have captured the public attention as well. It spread without any exceptions; that private and public sectors and large and small organizations have engaged in different types of layoff strategies (Schmitt et al, 2011). Accordingly, millions of the employees have been affected and became unemployed (ibid). A large numbers of employees have been laid off even in those countries that didn't used to take this action such as China and Japan (Datta et al, 2009).

Although organizations engage in reducing their workforce as a reactive strategy to enhance their effectiveness and viability by improving the performance, productivity and profitability, its significant financial and economic outcome is questionable (Cameron, 1994; Casio et al, 1997; Budros, 1999; Gandolfi, 2009). Consequently, layoffs' consequences go beyond organizations' boundaries by affecting employees' families and society as well. It involves different dimensions of stress, depression, reduction in self-confidence and sometimes, in some extreme cases, it may even lead to the desire to commit suicide as a rejection of the new reality (Konovsky & Folger, 1991).

Eventually, when layoffs have become inevitable action, it echoed outside organizations' boundaries and occupied a considerable space in the public media as general and newspapers in particular. Especially, during economy's downturn circumstances, newspapers articles play important role in reporting, framing and representing the discourse on layoffs in the society (Martin & Oshagan, 1997; Histro & Moisaner, 2010). The concept of discourse, thus, is central to this thesis, following the definition of Jørgensen & Phillips (2002: 12) who define the discourse as "*a particular way of talking about and understanding the world*".

Generally, news texts use the language which could be considered as an effective weapon in constituting the perception of the public about the different phenomena (Fairclough, 1992). Language contributes in producing and reproducing of the social reality (ibid.). However, Fairclough argues that language, whether in its spoken or written form, as it is a human production, it (re)produces people's and their society's reality through its meanings and utterances.

Newspapers coverage of a managerial practice helps in attracting public attention to its reality and consequences (Hollister, 2009). News texts, in turn, provide the public with the news and information about layoff events, such as the organizations that conduct this practice, the number of affected employees, etc. However, the language

that newspapers use to communicate and deliver the antecedents, consequences, reasons and other explanations of layoffs plays an important role in articulating a collective understanding, perception and social reality of this organizational and business phenomenon. Arguments that appear in newspapers in the course of explaining and portraying the phenomenon are vital tools in justifying and legitimizing it and constituting different discourses on it (Vaara & Tienari, 2002; 2008). However, there are few studies of layoff discourse in newspapers (Martin & Oshagan, 1997).

Since it is globally widespread, the layoffs phenomenon might be reflected on and represented in different discourses and ideologies according to each context's characteristics. Therefore, this study will trace the discursive constitution of layoffs in the Swedish news texts by concentrating on text articles about layoff events in three large organizations, Volvo, Ericsson and SAS, that have published in *Dagens Industri* (*di.se*) and *Dagens Nyheter* (*dn.se*) as two major and well-known Swedish newspapers.

In an attempt to contribute to the small number of studies on layoffs discourse in news texts, this study will employ a critical analytical perspective to examine how the discourse of layoffs is constituted and depicted in news texts, and how they reflect on and represent the layoff phenomenon in the Swedish context. Moreover, the thesis will also analyze how news texts discourse illustrates the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) in dealing with layoffs process. Because HRM specialists in organizations are supposed to possess knowledge of organizational and behavioral issues, which enables them to engage in the all stages of the layoffs process starting from preparation and ending up in implementing stage in order to fulfill a successful layoffs practice (Dalton et al., 1996). Thus, the thesis concerns with a third party's understanding, perception and representation of the layoffs practice, but it doesn't concern with its implementation process within organizations. Through this aim, the objective of the present study is to provide a critical analysis and descriptions, for HR-specialists and practitioners, employees, the researchers, the people working in media and for the public, of the Swedish newspapers discourse on layoffs.

Accordingly, the main research questions of this thesis are:

1. *How do newspaper articles in Sweden (re)produce and constitute the discourse(s) on layoffs?*
2. *How do these discourses reflect the social reality?*
3. *How do newspaper articles represent and portray the role of Human Resource Management in the layoffs process?*

2. Employee layoffs in the news texts

2.1. The objective perspective of news texts on layoffs

Corporate downsizing practice and what follows it; employees' reduction is getting more and more public attention and widespread diffusion through business and public press. However, handfuls studies have concentrated on examining employee downsizing and layoffs practice through analyzing the content and language of media texts. Generally, some studies have adopted a rigorous and objective quantitative approach in analyzing the content of newspaper articles, whether the business or general ones, within span of time ranges between five to thirty years in order to examine different aspects of employee downsizing (Lamertz and Baum 1998; Baumol et al., 2003; Hollister, 2009; Pace, 2010; Brimeyer et al., 2012). These studies didn't explore directly the language, discourses or the ideologies that those newspapers adopt in talking about this practice and communicating it to the public. However, they have focused, mainly, on exploring the types of the facts and statistical information that have published in news texts, and they inclined to explain the phenomenon as an inevitable cause of economic, political and social change.

For instance, Baumol et al., (2003) have conducted a quantitative study to analyze the content of downsizing articles that appeared in the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal, between 1993-1997 in order to examine the causes and consequences of downsizing in America. In this study the authors focus on the types of information about downsizing and they have dealt with them in statistical manner. Specifically, they classified the sectors, the type of the organizations and the number of laid-off employees within each sector and industry. Hence, they seek a rigorous and objective result; away from the subjective analysis of those newspapers' language and discourse. Accordingly, they found that economic downturn and financial problems are main causes of downsizing. In addition, they found higher prevalence of this practice in manufacturing and private sectors, and less educated employees are more vulnerable to be downsized.

In a more discourse oriented study, Brimeyer et al., (2012) in their longitudinal study with 28-year span, have adopted the quantitative approach to explore how media texts' framing and representing of layoffs in USA have changed over time. Their findings confirm the escalation in newspapers coverage of layoffs during economic downturns. Notwithstanding, according to the study, whereas news texts don't inclined to problematize layoffs practice during recession, they portray it as a problem during economic growth. However, the authors didn't examine either the language styles, forms and meanings have changed or not, nor other contextual aspects besides the economic cycles.

2.2. The discursive perspective of news texts on layoffs

According to Fairclough (1992) news texts communicate and deliver the news and different textual materials in their own language style, rhetoric, metaphor and discourse. Some scholars, thus, have concentrated on exploring news texts' language and the discourse on organizational changes, such as plant closing, restructuring and merger and acquisition, and the consequent displacement of employees (Martin & Oshagan, 1997; Larner, 1998;; Vaara & Tienari, 2002; Hellgren et al, 2002; Ahonen et al, 2007; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Histro & Moisaner, 2010). The qualitative critical discourse analysis approach is the common factor between these studies. A discursive analysis, in turn, highlights the economic, social, cultural and political overlapping effects in communicating, representing and framing the issues in news texts (Fairclough, 1993).

Moreover, a critical analysis of the language could clarify the stance and ideology through which newspapers communicate employees' displacement news to the public. Yet, news texts could affect the public's reaction to this business phenomenon through their widespread and persuasive language (Vaara & Tienari, 2002; 2008). Therefore, not only the facts and statistical information that news texts highlight are the important aspects in communicating news but the communicative language and discursive practices as well. Martin & Oshagan (1997) in their critical analysis of newspapers coverage of General Motor's closing of one of its plants clarify that newspapers discourse inclined to support and enforce the hegemony of the capitalist approach of GM in dealing with the workers. They argue that newspapers articles use an interpretative language to portray and frame the closing of the plant as an inevitable action that workers and their families should accept amicably.

Newspapers discourse on organizational change associates with the social change and is considered as an aspect of it (Histro & Moisaner, 2010). Organizational change's impact, however, affects not only the employees and the social construction of organization but the society within which it operates as well (Vaara & Tienari, 2002). In their critical analysis of two Finnish newspapers coverage of layoffs Histro & Moisaner (2010) highlight the salience and the dominance of justification and legitimization processes of the layoffs as an inevitable outcome of economic and financial circumstances. Accordingly, they identified and presented what they called the 'financialistic' discourse. It accounts for the shareholder interest and considers all organization's actors as elements of adding value. This shows in turn the lack of the social and ethical dimensions in this discourse. On the other hand, the authors have conceptualized the news texts representation of the effects of layoffs on employees as a moralistic discourse. They argue that this discourse characterizes with its concern with the social problems that layoffs cause and the moral responsibilities of different actors in avoiding and handling them.

Apparently, it could be argued that most of the news texts discourses on layoffs stem from the hegemony of organizations' top management and the shareholders, and their financial power in constituting certain arguments and discursive practices to

serve their interest (van Dijk, 1993). However, with the exception of the modest room of the moralistic discourse (Histro & Moisaner, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008), and the work of Erkama (2010), there is no evidence in the literature of whether there are any kind of resistant discourses, and whether news texts attempt to highlight the stance of different stakeholders regarding employee dismissal. Moreover, it seems that previous studies of news texts ignored the role of Human Resource Management in constituting the different kind of layoffs discourses. Making use of a critical perspective could be one way of amending these deficiencies of the earlier studies. For this reason I now turn to a more thorough presentation of relevant theoretical concepts available within this perspective.

3. The theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA)

3.1. The concept of discourse

Language is the most important communicative medium people use in order to give specific meanings to their different social life activities (Fairclough, 1992). However, language is used and employed differently according to the context, which creates various patterns of it (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). According to Jørgensen and Phillips those patterns are called discourses and they could vary depending on the differences in the social interactions. Hence, they define the discourse as “*a particular way of talking about and understanding the world*” (p. 12). However, Potter and Whetherell (1987:07) as cited in Grant et al, (2001:07) present a wider definition to the discourse as “*all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds*”. Thus, discourses permeate people’s social life deeply and affect its reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Nevertheless, according to Gergen (1985) there is no given reality of the social life that is always available somewhere. However, he argues that people use the language to produce and reproduce the social reality by giving meanings to their activities and categorizing them in different fields according to specific semantic characteristics. This categorization tendency of the knowledge, the representation of the reality and the identity of the social life with its different activities and interactions lead to the emergence of the discourses (ibid).

Moreover, according to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) social interactions do not revolve around one discourse but it can generate many and different discourses according to its different contexts. In addition, the authors note that discourse can be built on a certain ideology, i.e. view, idea or perception (ibid). However, ideology is a controversial concept and its acceptability varies among the different approaches of discourse analysis. For instance, the authors state that ideology is acceptable by critical discourse analysis scholars such as Fairclough and van Dijk. While it is rejected by some other scholars such as Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, who argue that ideology creates a false reality and distorts the truth by promoting the ideas and views of specific powerful group(s) and impose them on the others as a *fait accompli* (ibid).

3.2. The critical discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has a strong connection with the philosophers of social constructionism, as general, and post-constructionism, in particular, such as Foucault and Derrida (Prasad, 2005; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The post-constructionism depicts the knowledge and social life reality as changeable productions of people's cognition (Gergen, 1985). They assume that people (re)produce the reality through their interaction by using the language's utterances and meanings in order to determine and construct the different aspects of their social life (Prasad, 2005). Accordingly, discourse analysis is not only a theory but also a methodology of analyzing the patterns of talking and representing in each field of social science disciplines (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discourse analysis involves several approaches that enable the researcher to study the social phenomena from diverse stances. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the most important of these approaches (Fairclough, 1992, 1993; van Dijk, 1993). It is concerned with analyzing the language and communication of social interactions and tracing the social, political and cultural phenomena that can result from those interactions (van Dijk, 1993). According to CDA scholars, such as Fairclough (1992, 1993), although discourse is produced by social practice, but at the same time it is a type of social practice and both (re)produce the social world.

CDA is considered as a main approach in studying texts and talk (Fairclough, 1992), it concentrates on analyzing the meaning, style, form, rhetoric and cohesion of the text as premises to explore how they contribute in (re)producing the social reality (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993). However, the textual analysis depends on determining the discursive practices in the text. Discursive practice is the way through which text is (re)created and can include the words and ideas, and also it is the way through which text is received or consumed, i.e. how it is interpreted (Fairclough, 1993). Accordingly, Fairclough argues that discourse can be studied on three levels that include text; the language and its structure, discursive practice and social practice; the situational and institutional context.

Moreover, CDA is implied to bring together the macro and micro level of social order that van Dijk (1993) defines as macro level represents power, dominance and inequality between social groups, while micro level represents the verbal and communicative interactions. Hence, the interaction on the individuals and small group level could create dimensions of discourse which can be transformed by those social actors to a wider social structure (ibid). In addition, van Dijk (1993) assumes that CDA can be used to make deep understanding of some of the sociological phenomena such as social power and dominance. He describes the social power as "*it involves control, namely by (members of) one group over (those of) other groups. Such control may pertain to action and cognition...*" (p. 254).

With regard to the cognitive control, van Dijk (1993) notes that it could be practiced by following certain persuasive strategies in order to convince others with specific

idea or argument and, thus, impose a kind of dominance on them. Hence, media texts play significant role in practicing this kind of cognitive control (Fairclough, 1992). Consequently, the dominant groups are those have *access* to the media, through which they can communicate their ideas and arguments and impose them, even in subtle way, on other groups that do not have the same opportunity (van Dijk). Thus, by applying CDA in studying such texts can provide insights into the nature of the relations between those different social groups (ibid).

Discourses in turn are embedded in organizations' social and cultural constitution; they contribute in (re)producing the reality of organizations by supporting and enhancing their entity, power and legitimacy (Prasad, 2005). One of the most effective mechanisms of discourses' (re)production is the mass media as general and media texts in particular (Fairclough, 1992, 1993). In effect, when media texts pay attention to management practices it gives them another dimension through its public discourse. It could deliver the justification and interpretation of the organization; thereupon it produces and marketizes the organization's discourse (Vaara & Tienari, 2002). Or, on other hand, it represents and reflects on the management practices according to its own discourse and ideology (ibid).

Moreover, CDA is an interdisciplinary approach that can be employed to study different fields of the social science from various perspectives (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Fairclough, 1993; van Dijk, 1993). The pioneers of this approach, such as Fairclough (1992, 1993) and van Dijk (1993) emphasize the systematic textual analysis that includes intertextual and linguistic approaches in analyzing the social interactions, power and construction in different contexts. According to Fairclough (1993) the intertextual analysis connects the language to the social context within which text is created and interpreted. Specifically, CDA is interpretative and explanatory approach that can be based on specific ideologies in studying social realities that are embedded in different kinds of texts (Fairclough, 1992).

To summarize, the role of the analyst of the critical discourse is to examine the aspects of spoken and written language such as its style, form, constitution and grammar in order to clarify how these aspects contribute in creating and constructing the social reality regarding any social phenomenon (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Accordingly, by using the CDA theory and method, the analysis in this study will focus on exploring the layoffs discourse(s) in two Swedish newspapers and the consequences of these discourses in constituting a certain public perception of this managerial phenomenon.

4. Methodology

As previously mentioned, the critical discourse analysis (CDA), is the theoretical framework of this thesis as well as the method for analyzing its empirical data; the newspaper articles. However, the main aspects of CDA that were used for the purpose of this study are the linguistic aspects of the texts, the discursive practices, intertextual analysis and the social change aspects (Fairclough, 1992).

The empirical data for this thesis is the news articles that talk about layoffs in two well-known Swedish newspapers; *Dagens Industri*, daily business newspaper and *Dagens Nyheter*, daily general newspaper. This data included the two newspapers coverage of layoff events that took place in three large organizations in Sweden; *Volvo group*, *Ericsson* and *SAS*, within one year period, from Jan. to Dec. 2012.

In that year, Swedish labor market witnessed 7, 1470 redundancy announcements, as a highest number of employee layoffs announcement during three years after 2008 recession (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2012). The selected newspapers demonstrate a wide interest in covering the news of layoff events in different organizations during this year, however, some organizations gained the lion part of the media coverage, may be because of their large size and the big number of employees that they were announced to be laid-off, such as *Volvo*, *Ericsson* and *SAS* (see the following section).

According to its official website (dn.se, May, 2013) *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) is a prestigious general Swedish newspaper that was published for the first time on 23 December 1864. It is a tabloid daily morning newspaper, and it is distributed throughout the country with a daily circulation of about 883,000 and more than 1, 1 million visitors to its website per week. DN has many correspondents in different parts of Sweden and through the world as well. It is part of the Bonnier Group, which a private Swedish media group that was established in 1804 by the Bonnier family, and owns about 175 companies in 20 countries.

On the other hand, *Dagens Industri* (DI) is the biggest daily tabloid business newspaper in Sweden and the north countries (di.se, May, 2013). It was established in 1976 and it is owned by Bonnier Group as well. It covers the national and international business news and has a daily circulation of about 354,000.

4.1. The cases

The three organizations, *Volvo*, *Ericsson* and *SAS*, which were selected as cases for the purpose of this study share the fact that they are large and important organizations for Swedish people and government. They have created a considerable ground and strong discourse and ideology for themselves (Grant et al, 2001) since they are big employers and they have large contribution in Swedish economy.

Volvo and *Ericsson* achieved the highest turnover in Sweden in 2011 (ekonomifakta.se, Feb. 2013). Moreover they are the biggest employers in Sweden;

Volvo group and Volvo cars employ 24,964 and 15,693 employees respectively and Ericsson employs 17,096 employees by the end of 2011 (ekonomifakta.se, Feb. 2013). The both organizations enjoy a high reputation throughout the globe and represent Sweden in excellent way in their field of specializations. Nonetheless, the two organizations have faced some financial troubles, accordingly, they engaged in reducing some of their workforce in Sweden. Ericsson announced in November, 2012 a reduction of about 1550 of its permanent and temporary employees. While the reduction of the workforce in Volvo Group included more than 1700 employees through 2012, the temporary and work agencies employees were the vast majority of them.

On the other hand, Scandinavian Airlines System AB (SAS) is the largest and most important airlines company in Scandinavia. It is a partnership between Sweden, Denmark and Norway (sasgroup.net, Feb. 2013). Sweden owns 50 % of it as the largest shareholder which is represented by the government and other Swedish shareholders such as some pension funds and labor unions (sasgroup.net, Feb. 2013). Moreover the head office of SAS group is located in Stockholm, Sweden, which gives it an additional importance for Sweden. In the year 2012 the organization faced very hard financial circumstances, which forced it to announce strict austerity measures that included a reduction of about 6000 jobs.

The three organizations enjoy a high reputation in their field of specializations throughout the globe, which they have built over time and through their successful journey in the business world. However, organizational reputation depends on an effective organizational discourse; its behaviors towards stakeholders and the way that its members talk about it and reflect upon it (Hardy et al, 2000). Specifically, it is the way that they produce and reproduce its social reality emanating from their social interactions within and outside it (Grant et al, 2001).

4.2. The data collection

The data of this study has been collected in stages; firstly, general news articles of layoff events were collected from the archive of the newspapers' online version during the period from 01 January 2012 to 31 December 2012; i.e. one year period. Three keywords were used; *layoffs* (*uppsägningar*), *downsizing* (*neddragning*) and *cutbacks* (*nedskärning*). The articles that were used for this study include news articles, editorials and columns by journalists.

The author has created an electronic folder for each newspaper articles and created a file for each keyword. That means all the articles that come under each keyword were put together in one electronic file by copying them from the newspaper website and pasting them in a word document. The using of the three keywords generated a number of about 126 articles regarding layoff events in different organizations that were published in the selected newspapers during 2012.

In the second stage, the author read through all the articles and classified them by giving the articles that related to each organization different font color. Then, more

repeated organizations were sorted out which were; *SAS, Ericsson, Volvo, Stora Enso* and *Telia*. Finally, the most three repeated organizations in the texts news of layoff events were chosen as cases for the purpose of this study, which were *SAS, Ericsson* and *Volvo*. The collected news texts of the layoff events in these organizations during the year 2012 were 40 articles, i.e. 31.7%, which were put together in one word document file; however, the articles of each organization were put in a separate section (see table 1). Only the articles that related to the topic and included texts about employee dismissal were incorporated, while those texts that talk, for instance, about stock markets and other unrelated aspects were excluded.

Organization \ Newspaper	DI	DN	Total
Ericsson	6	6	12
Volvo	7	5	12
SAS	9	7	16
Total	22	18	40

Table 1: A summary of the news texts material

4.3. The analysis

The analysis of the empirical material proceeded in stages; firstly, the news articles have been sorted out by putting those articles that talk about the layoff events in *Volvo, SAS* and *Ericsson* in one word document and under different sections. Then, the author read, more than one time, through all the articles to make a deep understanding of the development of the events in each organization and the news texts interpretations of them. Subsequently, as a preliminary analysis step (Grbich, 2013) some main arguments, discussions and interpretations within the news texts was identified and highlighted in different font colors within the texts. This step aimed at clarifying and identifying some discourses and discursive practices and moves of layoffs practice in the news texts.

Secondly, as a systematic analysis step (Grbich, 2013), the material was imported as RTF file into the qualitative software program Atlas T (version 6). Thirdly, on the software program, the material was organized and coded according to different arguments, discussions and interpretations that emerged throughout the news texts material, which represented different discourses and discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992). Subsequently, through the coding process the data was classified and categorized and re-categorized in different categories. Finally, an initial network of the codes and categories was created (see figure 1).

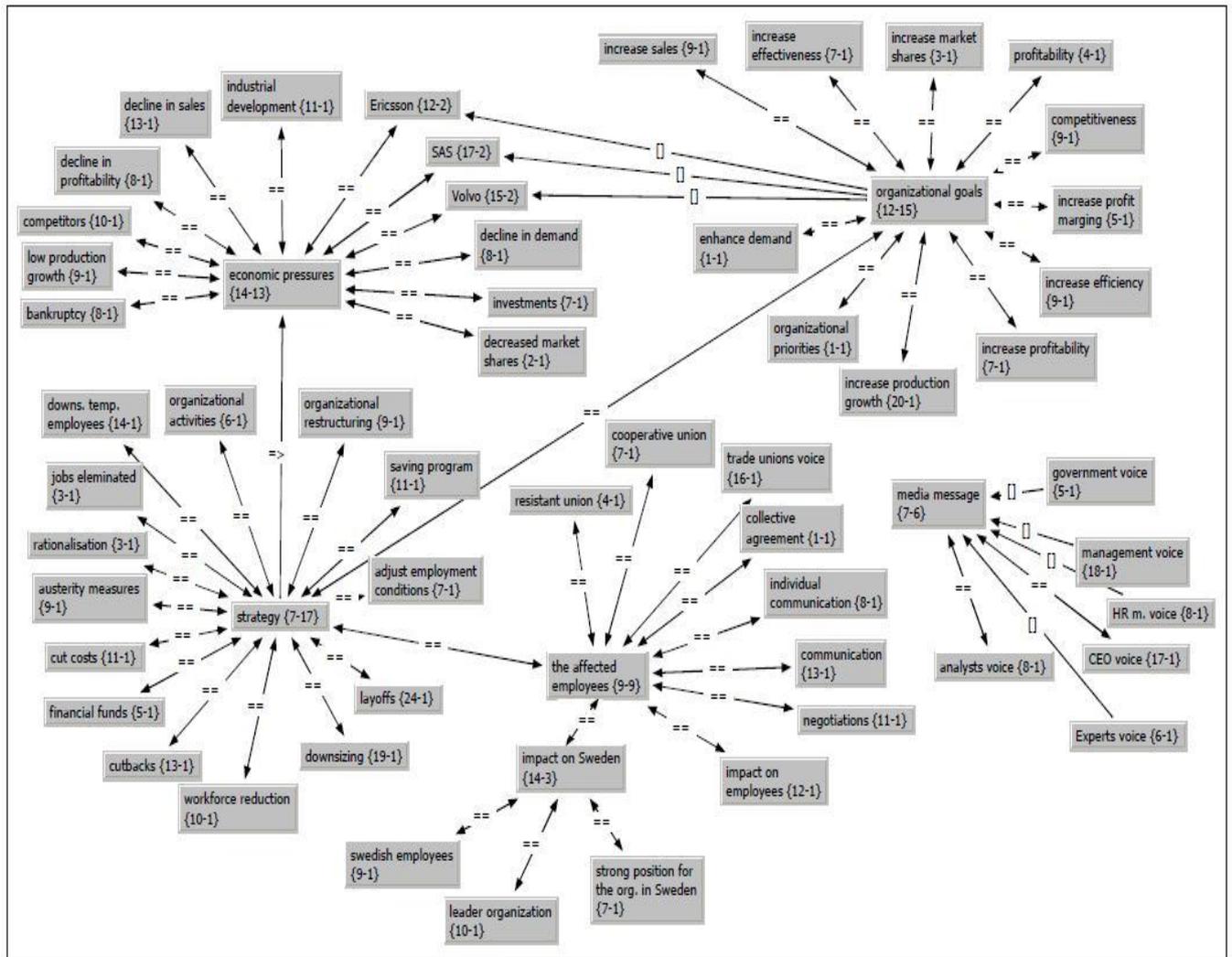


Figure 1: Network of the codes and categories

The categories were organized according to the type of information, arguments, interpretations and voices that news texts narratives have provided such as:

1. The information and procedures regarding layoff events in each organization that news texts focused on.
2. The different voices that emerged through the news texts during layoffs process within each organization and the differences between them.
3. The argumentations that emerged through the news texts to justify and explain why layoffs practice was adopted and the different actors that involved in those argumentations processes.
4. The discussions and interpretations through the news texts regarding the concerns and aspects of employment relations activities in the three selected organizations during layoffs process, such as negotiations and communication, and the main actors that involved in those activities.
5. The discussions in the news texts regarding the concerns of reducing the workforce of the selected organizations in Sweden and its effects on their image and position in the country.

6. The news texts reflection and interpretation of the voice and activities of HR managers during the layoff events in the three organizations.
7. The convergences and divergences between the different arguments, discussions, interpretations and voices that news texts demonstrated and highlighted regarding layoff events in the selected organizations.

As a further step and as the focus of the present study is the discursive level of the news texts, i.e. the discursive practices and the discourse types, not the textual level of them (see Fairclough, 1992). The author concentrated at this step on identifying the framing (Entman, 1993) as well as the justification, legitimization and evaluation processes (Vaara & Tienari, 2002) that emerged through the news texts interpretations, representations and portraying activities of the layoff events in the three organizations. These processes and activities were exemplified by excerpts from the news texts material and the original texts of these excerpts in Swedish were provided in the appendix (see appendix 1).

Moreover, in order to provide more understanding of the different discourses a micro-level linguistic textual analysis (van Dijk, 1993) was conducted as well. In this sense text was deconstructed (Prasad, 2005) to explore the discursive moves and ideologies behind it. Finally, the analysis reflected on what might be found behind the lines, or the 'unsaid' (Fairclough, 1992).

4.4. Trustworthiness

Discourse analysis as a qualitative approach faces the challenges of pursuing some rigorous criteria. Specifically, discourse analysis provides an interpretive text that does not pursue a specific truth behind the phenomenon under study (Stevenson, 2004). But it aims at describing it within its specific context, and to generate a clear understanding of its meanings without any generalization intention of the findings outside the studied context (ibid). Thus, the reliability criteria for discourse analysis concerns the quality of the analysis by avoiding to use isolated quotation, taking sides and the lack of clarity in interpreting the discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000). In addition, the formulation of appropriate discourse analysis's research questions and the clear description of the text(s) that would be used as empirical material are important criteria for the validity of a discourse analysis research (ibid).

Drawing on the above criteria, in order to make a deep understanding of the different perspectives and aspects of the present study, the author has firstly read through many previous studies that addressed the studied topic from different perspectives and methods. The research questions were formulated carefully and directed to explore the texts and meanings of newspapers coverage of employee dismissal in the Swedish context in order to discern the social reality that might be created through them.

The empirical material was collected in stages and checked carefully. All the codes and categories that were used in the analysis were provided to present clear picture of

the material. The result section was supported with complete quotations to avoid isolating them from their context and to present a vivid description of the material.

Finally, it is worthy to say that the role of the author as interpreter is not completely neutral but, to some extent, it might be affected by some predetermined judgments, meanings, ideas and views. Thus, some other interpretations and meanings probably have not taken the opportunity to be realized and presented.

In the following, as a part of the empirical section of this study, a general overview of the news texts coverage of the layoff events in the three organizations will be presented. Subsequently, the discursive practices and discourse types of the news texts on layoffs practice will be identified and described.

5. The aspects of the newspapers coverage of the layoff events in the three organizations

In this section, a general background about the context of layoff events in each organization that emerged through the articles of the two newspapers will be displayed in a neutral manner.

5.1. The newspapers coverage of the layoff events in *Ericsson*

From the articles about *Ericsson*, an image of a company in crisis in a rapidly evolving industry is displayed in the media texts. It is known that the telecommunication industry witnesses rapid progress and development paces in its different aspects leading by several international telecommunication organizations. Recently, *Ericsson* as a pioneer in this field, the thing that is confirmed by its HR manager Tomas Qvist: “*We are a world leader in a very tough market*”¹ (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012), faces an aggressive competition from other international organizations such as *Huawei*, *Samsung* and *Nokia Siemens Networks* (di.se, 26 Oct. 2012). Accordingly, its sales, market shares and profitability have dropped notably. Nevertheless, the organization revealed that it predicted to achieve growth rates ranging from 3 to 14% within its different segments during 2012 – 2015 (di.se, 06 Nov. 2012).

Thus, *Dagens Nyheter* published on 07 May, 2012 that *Ericsson* released a press message in which it announced that in order to adapt to the competition’s challenges in the industry it has decided to shift to more software-based products. Consequently, in May 2012 the organization announced a decision of reduction of 95 employees in Mölndal, Sweden (dn.se, 07 May, 2012).

However, it seems that the organization was looking for a more radical action to improve its profitability and efficiency. Therefore, in Nov. 2012 *Ericsson* announced that it will adopt comprehensive cutbacks and austerity procedures and provided several arguments to justify these actions, such as to face the aggressive competition, to enhance the efficiency and profitability and to attract and convince the investors

(dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012). The presented plan includes a reduction of 1550 of its employees in Sweden “1,550 jobs eliminated at Ericsson”² (di.se, Heading, 07 Nov. 2012), which represents 9% of its workforce in the country. According to *Dagens Industri* (07 Nov. 2012) the plan affected permanent, temporary and work agencies employees in the all departments and the most branches of the organization in Sweden including the department of research and development and the top management positions.

According to the newspapers the employees will be laid off permanently and the number can be increased “new cuts are expected”³ says Hans Vestberg the CEO of *Ericsson* (di.se, 07 Nov. 2012). The articles show how management has first taken the decision of layoffs and then it rapidly started to negotiate with the unions about the implementation procedures. “The union has already begun to negotiate with management about how the cuts will be implemented.”⁴ (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

On the other hand, management was described as it is keen to deliver the layoffs announcement to the employees individually, through the line managers not through the unions, in a certain time that it has already been set (di.se, 07 Nov. 2012). This point will be clarified further in the next section.

To summarize this far, the voice of different actors of the organization has been heard through the news texts; the CEO and top management members, the HR manager and the union’s representatives through different statements about the layoff events. However, the voice of the employees as individuals was completely absent. In addition, the news articles have not pointed to the redundancy period for the laid off employees and their financial rights, nor to the social or psychological supports that the organization may provide to the laid off or the remaining employees. Instead the focus was on the costs reduction and change strategy in agreement with the unions.

5.2. The newspapers coverage of the layoff events in Volvo

The Car industry in Sweden, as in all over the world, has been facing very hard times since the last recession in 2008 that were represented in a declining demand and funding problems (Jochem, 2010). That led car manufacturers to dismiss large numbers of their employees in order to cut their costs and continue in the market (ibid).

In line with the above facts, the news articles portrayed *Volvo* group as it is suffering decline in demand and recession in its different companies; Cars, Buses, Construction Equipment and Trucks (di.se, 05 Sep. 2012; dn.se, 27 Sep. 2012). As it was mentioned in a news article, that *Volvo Cars’* sales declined with more than 9% in the first half of 2012 and the organization lost about two billion crowns in six months (di.se, 15 Oct. 2012). In the same article it was concluded that this recession forced the organization to reduce its production capacity and, consequently, to reduce its workforce as well.

According to the newspapers coverage *Volvo Group’*s companies were described as having managed to avoid to layoff the permanent employees “Today we have no plans

to terminate the employment of permanent employees"⁵ says Stefan Jacoby the CEO of *Volvo Cars*, (di.se, 05 sept. 2012). Instead, the organization was described as having concentrated on reducing the temporary and work agencies employees significantly "Now we have basically terminated all temporary employees in Sweden."⁶ said the CEO of *Volvo Cars* (di.se, 18 Dec. 2012). For instance, in *Volvo Cars* between 200- 300 contracts of agency employees would not be extended (di.se, 18 Dec. 2012).

Volvo Construction Equipment downsized 50 of its temporary employees and the action was ascribed to the declining demand (di.se, 23 May 2012). On the other hand, *Volvo Group Trucks* has reduced 300 of its work agencies employees because of the same reason (dn.se, 13 Dec. 2012). However, *Volvo Buses* was the only company of the group that was described in the news articles as it dismissed 330 permanent employees as well as 60 of the temporary ones. The action was ascribed to its intention to move the plant from Säfte, Sweden to Poland (di.se, 03 Oct. 2012).

It is worthwhile to mention that agency workers became legal in Sweden according to the temporary work agency act 1993 (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012). Since then, the agency workers phenomenon has developed gradually, and they are being employed in different organizations size, especially in the private and industrial sectors, in Sweden. However, they are mostly employed to conduct simple and non-core jobs (ibid).

In sum, according to the newspapers, the decision of layoffs in *Volvo* organizations involved basically the temporary and work agencies employees; this is maybe the reason why the news articles did not point to negotiation processes with the unions in the most of the group's companies. The exception was the case of *Volvo Buses* organization which its decision of workforce reduction has included 330 of the permanent employees that required a negotiation with the union.

The hearable voices that emerged through the news articles were for CEOs and top management members who argue for the importance and inevitability of the workforce reduction and the austerity measures. The presence of the unions' representatives is very weak and the voice of the employees as individuals was completely absent.

5.3. The newspapers coverage of the layoff events in SAS

The newspapers coverage of the SAS context during the questioned period concentrated on what they described as a critical financial position of the airlines organization. In this sense, the organization situation was described as it has faced aggressive financial circumstances in recent years that, according to *Dagens Industri* newspaper, resulted of the last global economic crisis in 2008, in addition to the competition from the other organizations that adopt more effective operation strategies (di.se, 12 Nov. 2012). Moreover, the news articles reflected that the organization was not flexible enough in its employment strategies and the unions were not cooperative with the management in making organizational changes during the previous years (dn.se, 20 Nov. 2012).

Generally, the organization's situation that was displayed in the newspapers was very complicated. It was described as it was on its way to lose the banks funding and its operative license, if it couldn't improve its financial position (di.se, 19 Nov. 2012). Consequently, according to the newspapers coverage the situation has exacerbated and exploded in Nov. 2012 when the organization found itself in front of what was described as two ultimately solutions; to adopt aggressive cutbacks and reform measures or to go into bankruptcy.

The employees at SAS organization have 8 unions that vary depending on the diversity of their functions and countries, such as pilot union, cabin union and the union of the white collar workers (di.se, 18 Nov. 2012). The newspapers coverage clarified that the organization has started negotiating with these unions about some reforms measures. Those measures included workforce reduction with 6000 of the employees and 800 of the administration staff, reducing the salaries and employment conditions, increasing working hours and changing holiday rules and pension system (dn.se, 12 Nov. 2012).

Throughout the newspapers articles it was reflected that the organization has conducted hard negotiation processes with the unions in order to implement the above austerity and reforms procedures. The unions were central and strong actor that had a considerable presence in the newspapers articles during the negotiation "*We are prepared to do what is needed, as long as it is reasonable.*"⁷ Says the president of the Swedish pilot union at SAS, (di.se, 11, Nov. 2012). In addition, there are some other actors who have emerged on the scene of SAS crisis through the news articles which will be illustrated in depth in the next section. Such as government representatives, experts in the area of airlines, economy, bankruptcy and analysts, who talked about the feasibility and consequences of the austerity package and the different alternatives that the organization could adopt. However, in line with the cases of *Ericsson* and *Volvo*, the voice of the employees as individuals is absent as well.

6. The result of the analysis

Drawing on the work of Fairclough's (1992, 1993) and van Dijk (1993) on CDA, this section will clarify and describe the evaluation and framing of layoffs in news texts and what connects to them of rhetoric, discursive practices, interpretation and representation by adopting a micro-level approach (van Dijk, 1993) in analyzing its language vocabulary and meanings construction. And to identify what it involves of social and political effects on the different actors (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) such as organizations' management, unions, employees, government, HRM scholars and the other audiences.

6.1. The salient discourse types of layoffs in the Swedish newspapers:

Having analyzed the news articles material, some discursive elements of the layoffs practice have been recognized and some discourse types have been interpreted.

Rationalistic discourse (Vaara & Tienari, 2002), humanistic and nationalistic discourses (Vaara & Tierani, 2004) are the most notable and salient ones that have been interpreted throughout the analysis of the news texts material (see figure 2). Although the salience of these discourses is various but they are mostly overlapping and interconnected.

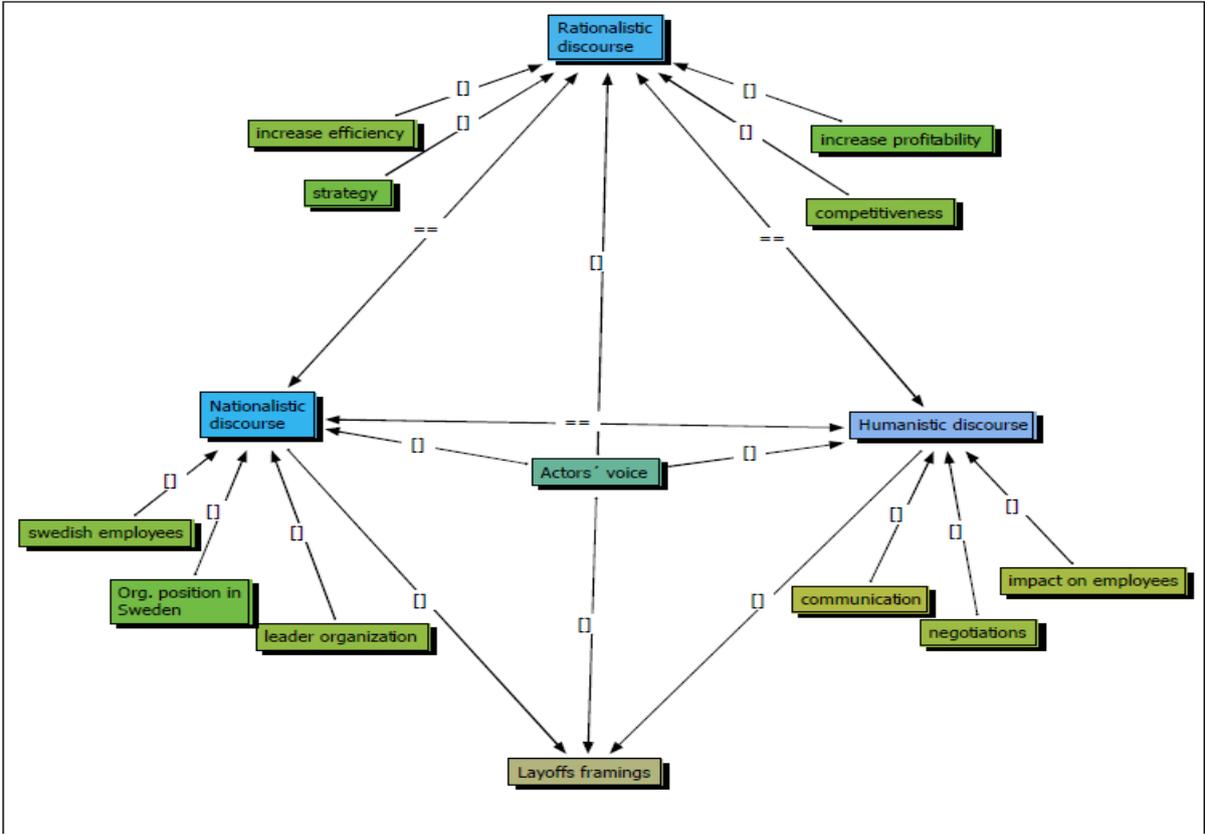


Figure 2: The interpreted discursive elements and discourse types

However, it seems that the rationalistic discourse is the most dominant one throughout the news articles of the two newspapers. Moreover, it is notable that news articles tend to highlight the economic and financial reasons and justifications, such as the reduction in sales, turnover and demand as main causes in reducing organizations profitability. Consequently, organizations engage in reducing their workforce in what is portrayed as a rational procedure to cut their financial costs in order to survive in the business world and to increase their profitability, competitiveness and efficiency.

In line with the humanistic discourse news articles highlight the role of different social actors in organizations in dealing with this practice. However, according to the analysis, it demonstrates that the voice of those actors is not equal. While the presence of the management is very strong, the voice of the unions occupies a less room, and there is no direct voice of the employees as individuals.

The interpretation of the nationalistic discourse in the news texts involves the discussion and justification of maintaining the studied organizations in order to

survive in the face of the economic difficulties, because they are portrayed as they represent Sweden as a state, and the Swedish brands. Taking into account the nature of these organizations as international ones that have many branches, subsidiaries and plants spread throughout the world, to maintain their reputation, thus, is sometimes considered as a patriotic obligation.

Through the following sections the discursive practices, justification and legitimization processes that demonstrated in the two newspapers articles will be traced. A deepened and systematic analysis of the three salient and dominant discourse types, *rationalistic*, *humanistic* and *nationalistic*, will be conducted in order to identify and describe the news texts framing and evaluating of the layoffs.

6.1.1. The rationalistic discourse

Having analyzed the news articles framings of employee displacement and layoffs in the three cases the author noticed the dominant tendency to depict this practice as rational and inevitable economic action, which comes in line with the characteristics of the rationalistic discourse. This discourse is interpreted to be presented to varying degrees in the statements of the different actors that were involved in the layoffs process, either the management members including HR managers, trade unions representatives or the government and other stakeholders.

In the following excerpts from articles in *Dagens Industri*, business newspaper, and *Dagens Nyheter*, general newspaper it is obvious that the three organizations are experiencing hard economic times that drive them to take vital decisions by reducing their workforce in order to survive. “*Volvo presents a report with disappointments across the lines. Drops in orders, earnings, sales and profitability are worse than expected. Now the company is flagging for new cutbacks*”⁸(di.se, 24 Oct. 2012). It is obvious that the decision of the cutbacks was taken as a response to the financial difficulties that the organization faces. The same scene repeats in *Ericsson* which intended to reduce its workforce in order to enhance the efficiency “*Telecom giant Ericsson will cut 1,550 jobs in Sweden. Measures are taken to reduce costs and increase efficiency...*”⁹ (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012). And *SAS* will cut the cost by downsizing its employees in order to avoid the fate of bankruptcy “*A SAS bankruptcy would have been worse than the cuts that are now at the doors of the announced savings plan*”¹⁰ (di.se, 20 Nov. 2012).

The two newspapers portray employee reduction as a natural and initial alternative in order to reduce costs and maintain the organizations to survive. It is represented as an inevitable solution of the organizations’ financial and inefficiency problems.

In line with the rationalistic discourse, newspapers portray layoffs as abstract and objective decision. It is justified by purely economic motives, to reduce the costs, which turn away from the consideration of the social actors. This justification is clear also in a statement of HR manager at *Ericsson* who says:

"We do not control what is happening in our world. What we can control ourselves as a company is our costs; therefore it is extremely important that we constantly look over them" (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012)¹¹

The economic arguments of layoffs justify and legitimize the practice and put it in an acceptable and legal frame (Boyer, 2003). Thus, employees are depicted, objectively, as subjects and economic elements that can be evaluated according to organization's financial situation.

Rationalistic discourse of layoffs beside its discursive practices of reducing costs and enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, it involves aspect of discussing the competitiveness and strategy of the organization as well. As the last recession in 2008 affected all organizations worldwide, the discussion of returning back to the market and building new competition ability through cutting costs and reducing workforce, represent the dominant tendency in the survivor organizations (Datta et al, 2010). The following extracts are statements of HR manager that were quoted in the two newspapers, demonstrate these discursive practices.

"To maintain our technological leadership and ensure competitiveness in the fierce competition, we need to look at our costs." Says Tomas Qvist, the HR manager at Ericsson¹² (di.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

It appears that the HR manager, as a management representative, prioritizes organizational development and its competitiveness. His rational economic arguments justify cutbacks and use it as a required and vital means as well as a basic condition to enhance the organizational viability and ensure its survival.

In addition, news articles represented employee downsizing as an essential part of organization's strategy in order to increase its efficiency and development. The below statement of the HR manager at *Ericsson* demonstrates this argument and clarifies that HR manager is an integral part of the organizational strategy, as well as an arm of implementing it.

"To ensure that we can continue to implement our strategy to maintain our market leadership, investing in R & D and meeting our customers' needs, we must continually drive efficiency and reduce our costs"¹³. Says the HR manager at Ericsson in Sweden (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012)

Furthermore, the cost reduction and downsizing are represented as "*must*" be adopted in order to perform efficiently and maintain organizations position. *"For SAS cost saving programs to succeed in the long term, it must be combined with an aggressive strategy and downsizing..."¹⁴ (di.se, 12 Nov. 2012).*

These discursive practices and moves are integral part of the rationalistic discourse of layoffs that serves organization economic interest. In turn, the strategy concept could be considered as a kind of the rhetoric that people use to justify and give meaning to certain types of organizational activities (Hardy et al, 2000), which certainly include layoffs practice.

Another aspect of the rationalistic discourse of layoffs that emerged in the analysis of the news articles material is the arguments of sales reduction and the decline in demand especially in cars industry.

“The weak sales forces Volvo Cars to reduce production in the fall rate in Torslanda factory in Gothenburg. As a consequence the contracts of about 200-300 people, who have been hired from agencies, will not be extended”¹⁵ (di.se, 05 Sept. 2012),

The affected workers here are the temporary agency employees. The declining demand and weak sales are strong economic justification of dismissing employees, the temporary workers in particular, and not to extend their contracts. The News articles frame this kind of layoffs that regards agency workers as a legitimate decision that enhancing by the economic justifications. *“AB Volvo has doubled the number of temporary employees who must leave the company's factory in Skövde....the reason for the staff reduction is the declining sales of trucks”¹⁶* (dn.se, 13 Dec. 2012)

It thus seems that employee reduction is represented as a natural means to prevent and handle the economic crises and to improve the financial value of the organization. To terminate the temporary workers' contract and dismiss them is framed as a normal and not dangerous action, maybe because they are not core employees and they mostly do marginal jobs (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012).

Beside the management, the success and continuity of organizations is a matter of different actors, such as unions, government and some other external stakeholders. These actors may interpret layoffs practice as a rational decision that could be taken according to certain rational and objective reasons. In news articles material there are some statements of different actors through which the rationalistic discourse of layoffs could be traced.

For instance, the following excerpt is a statement that made by Mr. Fredrik Reinfeldt the Swedish Prime Minister regarding the layoffs events at Ericsson.

“A Company like Ericsson is expanding in parts of the world where its markets are growing, and then it pulled down its number of employees in Sweden”¹⁷ says Fredrik Reinfeldt the Swedish prime minister (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

It appears that the Prime Minister appreciates the growth of *Ericsson* outside Sweden. However, he ascribes the layoffs to the international expansion of the Swedish organization. Hence, it could be seen as if the international growth of the organization comes at the expense of the Swedish employees.

According to the prime minister's statement the layoffs is a normal practice that organization can adopt whenever it is required. He used the expression (*pulled down its number of employees*) instead of (reduced...) as a diplomatic expression that one can use to describe the reduction action of things or materials. This comes in line

with the characteristics of the rationalistic discourse which only deals with the actors as a means that can be used whatever serves the interest of the organization.

Furthermore, the rationalistic discourse could be traced also in unions' representatives' statements. Although the basic function of the unions is to protect the employees and defend their rights, but the below statements for the president of SAS's white collars union demonstrate that union could look at layoffs rationally when it comes to saving the existence of the organization itself.

“This trend will continue. I see further rationalization, reorganization and more in the company that makes the cost comes down”^{18/.../} “We must reduce the number of employees to come down in cost structure” says Sven Cahier the president of SAS White collar workers union (di.se, 11 Nov. 2012).¹⁹

The union president, thus, describes organizational restructuring as a rational decision in order to cut costs. Unions concerned with the interest of the organization and work on it even it costs them to sacrifice some of their members.

In order for the union to serve employees interest, the organization itself should be protected and maintained. Thus, it could be considered as a rational thinking to accept to lay off some of the employees in order to maintain some other by reducing the costs. Thus, in these statements the layoffs is framed as a rational action that “*must*” be adopted as a mechanism to reduce the costs and maintain the organization activities.

However, this rational stance of SAS unions that was announced through Dagens Industri newspaper, is considered as it came late according to the below excerpt from an editorial in Dagens Nyheter, the Swedish daily general newspaper. In its editorial the newspaper criticizes and blames what it described as the subjectivity and irrationality of SAS's unions during the previous years. Specifically, it accuses unions that they were an obstacle in front of necessary organizational changes.

“Hard criticism can be directed to the unions that over the years blocked the necessary changes, because they acted as if it was perpetual and more for employees than customers.”²⁰ (dn.se, Editorial, 20 Nov. 2012).

The newspaper frames and evaluates organizational changes, which may include layoffs, as “*necessary*” and it is required to be treated in an objective manner. It considers the organization as an economic body that should be treated objectively to serve the customers' needs not only the employees'. Accordingly, the employees should be considered as any changeable input that subjects to organization's interest. Thus, in line with the characteristics of the rationalistic discourse, the newspaper calls the union to be objective and to look at the employees' role in the organization as changeable economic means.

Generally, the salient aspects of rationalistic discourse of layoffs that news article highlight through the justification and legitimization discursive practices are the cost reduction, organizational competitiveness and efficiency. Moreover, the voice of the

top management is very hearable within this discourse through different statements of the management members who justify and defend the organizations' procedures. The voice of HR managers is not exception within this discourse, on contrary, news texts portrayed it as a quite strong voice that provides rational justifications for the layoff events.

In addition, the rationalistic discourse of layoffs in the Swedish newspapers emerged through the voice of the Swedish government that was represented in a statement by the Prime Minister. At that statement news texts depicted the government as it showed a rational understanding and even justification for the organizations tendency in adopting layoff activities.

Furthermore, the voice of the employees as individuals, who are directly affected by layoffs practice, is totally absent, there is not a single statement for an individual employee.

Finally, the two newspapers tend to present (neutral) narratives of the layoff events in the three organizations in a factual manner. Although there are no significant differences in the salient of the rationalistic discourse in the coverage of the two newspapers, but the articles of *Dagens Industri*, the Swedish daily business newspaper, show some more elaboration on this discourse.

6.1.2. The Humanistic discourse

In the humanistic discourse on layoffs, news articles tend to highlight and evaluate some of the social interactions that associate with the layoff events in the selected organizations and to reflect some social actors' voice. It is also supposed that HRM will represent a considerable presence through this discourse regarding its activities towards employees. The analysis of the news articles has revealed several aspects of this discourse, are represented in the negotiations with unions, the communication with the employees and the discussions of layoffs consequences.

*"Negotiations with the unions at Ericsson about how cutbacks will be implemented have begun."*²¹ (di.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

It seems as unions' view and agreement are for great importance in order for layoffs decision to be implemented. Accordingly, news texts provided a considerable room for the voice of unions and their activities during layoffs events, especially the negotiation processes. It is interpreted as a decisive action in implementing the layoffs decision. This keenness of highlighting the activities of the discussion between the management and unions might be to confirm that these activities are not a choice for the management but an obligation that is imposed by law in Sweden (Lundh, 2004).

However, although negotiation is represented as a democratic means that enables the employees to deliver their voice to the management and to participate in the layoffs

decision, but still it appears that the management possesses the power and authority to pass its agenda through its hegemony position.

“Copenhagen negotiations over the weekend are the end of the last days’ drama in which the SAS management threatened to ask the company into bankruptcy...”²² (dn.se, 18 Nov. 2012).

This clarifies the tone of threat that the management in SAS used by saying if the unions didn’t accept the proposed austerity program, then the organization will be announced as bankrupt and, definitely, all the employees will lose their jobs - not only some of them. This is clarified in a statement by the bankruptcy expert, Marie Karlsson-Tuula, in the context of her comment on the negotiations between SAS management and the unions, she says that: “... Here it appears that the use of bankruptcy as a pressure to get the trade unions to agree to the terms.”²³ (dn.se, 18 Nov. 2012). In this sense, the unions showed a high degree of the responsibility when they stated that they are keen that the organization continues operating *“I have told my members that the best we can do is to ensure that production is rolling.”*²⁴ said Robert Gustafsson, the president of the Swedish pilot unions at SAS (di.se, 11 Nov. 2012).

On the other hand, the news texts demonstrated that the union organizations pay obvious and interesting attention to the communication activities that accompany layoffs events, albeit it is an integral part of the Swedish employment relations (Lundh, 2004).

*“We have been informed continuously about the plan and its proposed content”*²⁵ Said a union’s representative at SAS (dn.se, 12, Nov. 2012).

As layoffs practice influences the employees directly, the organizations seem very interested in providing them with layoffs information in an effective way. *“For us it is important that managers are in place when this type of information is provided to our employees.”*²⁶ Says Ericsson communication manager: Helena Norrman (di.se, 07 Nov. 2012). In order to show the organization interest in delivering the information in a quite respectful manner, the news texts demonstrated that the layoffs information will be communicated by the managers directly to each individual employee, *“...in March 2013, the staff can get individual information about who is affected by the cutbacks.”*²⁷ (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

It seems that the news articles reflect layoffs communication as important practice that organization does in a respectful manner. This discursive practice comes in line with the arguments of the importance of organizational communication during organizational change which is considered as vital practice in order to achieve a successful change process (Russ, 2009).

Another aspect of the humanistic discourse is the discussion that is raised by unions and some experts about the layoffs’ effects and consequences on both the affected and the remaining employees. For instance, in the following quote of a union’s representative at Ericsson the news texts show the difficulties that employees could

suffer: “This takes energy from employees who become stressed and lose focus despite the fact that they must continue to work to increase profitability.”²⁸ (dn.se, 07 Nov. 2012).

News articles didn't talk a lot about the direct effects and consequences of the layoffs on affected employees. However, in one excerpt from *Dagens Industri*, the Swedish business newspaper reflected on the effect of the layoffs briefly as it is a very difficult experience that it means more than job loss; it can change the employee's life entirely “In addition to layoffs, there are many other things that can be changed for the employees.”²⁹ says the financial analyst Richard Björnelid (di.se, 11 Nov. 2012). It could be interpreted as job loss means substantial negative change in one's economic condition and, consequently, it might influence his/her social and psychological life (Konovsky & Folger, 1991).

Nevertheless, the discursive interpretation of layoffs consequences in the two newspapers articles seems to be very narrow and modest comparing to the size of the articles. This may further highlight the dominance of the rationalistic discourse on layoffs. Moreover, on contrary to what was assumed at the beginning of the description of this discourse, the voice of HR managers is completely absent in this discourse, even with regard to the communication activities.

6.1.3. The nationalistic discourse

The nationalistic discourse involves the discussions and justifications of maintaining the studied organizations in the face of the economic difficulties, because they represent Sweden as a state, and the Swedish brands. Taking into account the nature of the three selected organizations as international and regional ones that have many branches, subsidiaries and plants spread throughout the world, the layoffs of the Swedish employees have created kinds of nationalistic discussion. This discussion related to maintaining the position of these organizations and enhancing their existence in Sweden. In the sense, that the reduction of the Swedish workforce will not affect the Swedish authority and majority in these organizations.

“Sweden will be an extremely important platform for Ericsson even in the future”. Says a management member at *Ericsson*³⁰ (di.se, 08 Nov. 2012).

In spite of the layoffs among the Swedish employees *Ericsson* management claims that it still has the majority of its employees in Sweden, though, its Swedish activities are not in their best time. Moreover, the organization stresses that Sweden occupies a vital position in its activities which will continue in the future.

Proceeding from the fact that *Ericsson* is a pioneer Swedish organization in its industry, the organization claims seem to use patriotic arguments that directed to the all Swedish people, not only to the employees. These arguments could be perceived as reassurances of the people about the position of the organization in Sweden and to confirm that it will continue represent and support the country.

On the other hand, the overlapping between the rationalistic and nationalistic discourses on layoffs is not confined to management arguments, but it may demonstrate in other actors' arguments as well, Such as unions' representative. Thus, this may show that unions are not concerned only with the employees matter, but they are concerned with organizations as national bodies as well. "*We strive for Swedish company's long-term survival and well-stocks.*"³¹ says Sven Cahier, the president of SAS' s white collars union, (di.se, 11 Nov. 2012).

It seems that the union and management have the same priority to maintain and enhance the continuity and survival of the organization as a Swedish and regional economic body. "*We are very pleased that SAS continues, because SAS is a hub for Scandinavian aviation traffic. It is very important for growth,*"³², says the press officer at SAS, Jacob Elkjær. (di.se, 20 Nov. 2012). Moreover, for the both actors, the concern of the continuity of the organization appears to be a patriotic matter since it is considered as representative of the Swedish and the Scandinavian countries in its industry. Thus, layoffs practice is evaluated as rational action that should be adopted in order to save the organization not only as economic body, but as well as national body. This stems from the fact that Sweden owns 50% of SAS' s shares and the organization is the sole and main representative for the state in the aviation field. Therefore, to dismiss the employees in order to maintain the national organization could be considered as rational and acceptable justification.

To sum up, the three discourses emerged within the articles of layoffs of the two newspapers without significant differences between them, especially with regard to the rationalistic discourse. However, whereas the humanistic discourse got a little bit wider room in the articles of *Dagens Nyheter*, the Swedish daily general newspaper, the nationalistic discourse occupied a considerable space in the articles of *Dagens Industri*, the Swedish daily business newspaper, which appears even in the number of the quotations from the two newspapers with regard to this discourse.

Through this description of the three discourses various framings, justifications, interpretations and representations emerged in the news texts. Such as financial troubles, declining sales and demand, strategy, respectful information and communication in addition to the discussion about the Swedish brands.

In the next section these discourses, framings and justifications will be discussed and compared with the findings of the previous research. Moreover, the news texts representation of the role of HRM in dealing with the layoff events will be discussed further. In addition, the different kinds of social realities that reflected through the three discourses will be highlighted.

7. Discussion

7.1. The Production of the layoff discourses in the Swedish newspapers

In this thesis layoffs practice is studied from a critical and societal perspectives which represents another dimension, rather than the managerial dimension of this practice. CDA approach has been applied to examine how Swedish newspapers frame and justify layoffs practice. The critical analysis of news texts has provided a great opportunity to identify and explore the discourses on layoffs and the discursive practices that associate with different ideologies that the newspapers adopted to frame and evaluate this managerial practice.

Arguably, the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method provides an appropriate micro-level discursive perspective (Fairclough, 1992), stemming from the analysis of the language of the news texts and their discursive practices of framing, justification and legitimization of layoffs practice. Thus, it offers significant insights into different aspects of news texts coverage of a phenomenon (Leitch & Palmer, 2009). Moreover, according to Leitch and Palmer the micro-level analysis of news texts, which CDA provides, helps in exploring the ways in which news texts construct and (re)produce the social reality of the phenomenon, the layoffs in this case. In effect, the absence of the voice of individual workers, that analysis revealed, is one example of a social reality that was (re)produced through the framings and justifications of the studied articles.

The analysis revealed different discursive practices that were used in the news texts to justify and legitimize layoffs practice, such as organizational effectiveness, efficiency, profitability, competitiveness, the consequences of layoffs and its national dimension. Accordingly, three main discourse types on layoffs practice in the selected Swedish newspapers were interpreted and identified which were labeled as, *rationalistic*, *humanistic* and *nationalistic*. However, in line with the findings of Vaara & Tienari (2002), the analysis showed, concretely, the domination of the rationalistic discourse in the two newspapers coverage of the layoffs events, and humanistic and nationalistic are subordinated to it.

Rationalistic discourse demonstrates considerably through the statements and comments of different actors, with an obvious domination of the management voice. This discourse emerges through some discursive practices such as increasing organizational efficiency, enhancing profitability and maintaining the organizations' existence *per se*. According to the analysis, through this discourse workforce reduction is justified as an inevitable and unavoidable action, that is not adopted arbitrary, but in order to maintain the survival and success of the organizations.

Moreover, the rational workforce reduction statements in the two newspapers follow or precede by objective justification statements that legitimize layoffs decision. The objectivity language, that news texts use to represent layoffs, depicts it as an imperative solution to the organizations' financial problems. This demonstrates

more in the termination of the temporary and work agencies employees, which is portrayed as a taken-for-granted action. This probably stems from the argument that claim that the recruitment of temporary workers ensures flexible employment practices for organizations and eases the organizational change process (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). It is highlighted, thus, as the one only reality that must be considered by the all actors, which adds a cognitive legitimacy to it (Suchman, 1995). This is the cognitive model we have for understanding layoffs, the news articles seem to say.

On the other hand, *humanistic* discourse emerges through the voice of unions and some other social actors. The analysis revealed that unions involve in the negotiations and communication processes that facilitates and legitimizes the workforce reduction in Sweden (Lundh, 2004). Considering that, unions enjoy a remarkable position in Sweden, on the organizational and public level, and these practices are fundamental aspects of the employment relations in the country (ibid).

However, there are evidences in the analysis that these practices are conducted as routinely managerial procedures without significant influences on the layoffs decision. Nevertheless, negotiation is vital in selecting the employees that will be dismissed, because Sweden enjoys high employment protection legislations that include the principle of seniority 'last-in-first-out' (Below & Thoursie, 2010). Therefore, when organization intents to reduce its workforce, it should dismiss those people who were employed lastly. However, in order to make some exceptions of this principle organization needs to engage in a negotiation and a bargaining process with unions (Lundh, 2004).

Interestingly, since Sweden represents the origin and central platform of these three international organizations, the matter of significant reduction of the workforce in Sweden generated a kind of identity discussion (Erkama, 2010) in the news texts. This discussion emerged in some statements of unions and management on maintaining the national position and identity (Teinari et al, 2003) of these organizations. The two actors are concerned with protecting the organizations as Swedish brands, and keeping the Swedish employees as a major workforce and enhancing their majority status in the organizations. However, in the light of the layoffs events, such discursive arguments could be used to legitimize and justify management decision and portray it as inevitable matter in order to maintain and develop the organization as national body (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Furthermore, these nationalistic arguments might be regarded as discursive strategies (Hardy et al, 2000) through which management legitimizes layoff practices. The reproduction of management arguments and justifications of layoffs by the news articles may create a kind of public understanding and empathy with the organization decision, by framing it as a means to enhance its growth in Sweden and not a vice versa.

7.2. The Swedish newspapers representation of the role of HRM in the layoff processes

In line with the arguments of Dalton et al (1996) about the effective involvement of HR managers in organizational restructuring process, the analysis clarified that HR managers are portrayed as main players in taking and implementing the layoffs decision. Through different statements and interviews, the voice of HR managers emerges to announce and justify the layoffs decision, however, in a rational manner. Their role is framed as they are concerned with organizational efficiency and strategies that aim at enhancing the organizations' profitability, which could be considered as an effective role of HRM to be integrated in the organizations strategy (Boxall & Purcell, 2011). However, on the other hand, news articles do not point to how HR managers dealt with the employees during and after layoffs process, with regard to the communication, coaching and social support, as substantial part of HRM functions (Bergström & Diedrich, 2011).

According to Dalton et al. (1996) HR managers bear the responsibility of managing layoffs properly starting from the decision-making process and ending with the evaluation of the process as a whole. Besides, they must take in their account all the possible alternatives and evaluate each one carefully according to the employment legislations and organization's circumstances. For instance, in collaborating with the line managers, HR managers can come up with different options to the layoffs. Such as negotiating the employees for reducing employment conditions and privileges, offering them fewer work hours, flexible work schedule or early pension (Papalexandris, 1996).

However, by tracing the discourse of HRM it appears to be concerned, to some extent, with employees' issues, but the rational HRM policies that firstly serve organization's economic interests predominate when it comes to the practice (Guest, 1999). Accordingly, HRM is criticized as it exploits the employees by managing and using them as resources for organization's interest and dismissing them whenever the action serves the organization interest as well (ibid). From this point, it could be argued that special consideration must be given to the employees, since they are substantially different from all other economic resources and production inputs, due to their human nature and its social consequences.

7.3. A comparison of the layoff discourses in the two newspapers

Notable that, the two newspapers tend to cover layoff events in a matter-of-fact manner, in other words, they don't color the coverage of these events with their own point of views by reflecting upon or commenting on from journalists perspective. But they mostly use statements of different actors in order to communicate, explain, justify and frame the events, however, according to the newspaper's principles and ideology (Entman, 1993).

In turn, the saliency of the voices of those actors, such as management, unions, government, experts and analysts varies significantly, in general, and through each discourse, in particular. Nevertheless, the domination of management voice, which is represented by CEOs and top management members including HR managers, is quite obvious particularly through the rationalistic discourse.

Moreover, the salience of the three discourses varies between the news texts coverage of the layoff events in the three organizations. Whereas the dominance of the rationalistic discourse is very obvious in the coverage of layoff events in the three organizations, the humanistic and nationalistic discourses are less salient in the case of *Volvo* organization. With the exception of one article, there is no mention of the negotiations and communication processes, nor the consequences of the layoffs in the news articles that are related to it. This may be due to the nature of the dismissed employees who are temporary ones, and are assumed to do marginal jobs within organization (Håkansson & Isidorsson, 2012). Their termination, thus, does not require to be negotiated with the unions or conducting an intensive communication process.

However, the humanistic discourse was more pronounced in the coverage of the case of *Ericsson* and particularly in the case of *SAS*. This may be ascribed to the wide public discussion which has accompanied *SAS* financial crisis, and the probability of the bankruptcy that the organization was facing, unless it reaches an agreement with the unions on an aggressive cutbacks process, which was achieved eventually.

7.4. The social reality that emerged through the studied discourses

Social reality is an important aspect of the textual critical analysis; that the text is analyzed on the language level; the structure and meaning and also on the contextual level; the situational and institutional context (Fairclough, 1992). Drawing on this point, the present study highlights this aspect through the three studied discourses.

For instance, through the previous discussion it became clear that the dominance of the rationalistic discourse provided strong framework through which layoffs practice is justified and framed as a necessary and an unavoidable managerial action. The employees and the whole society, thus, have nothing to do with this pragmatic situation, but to cope with it. This situation enforces by the strong presence of the management voice in the news texts as the main provider of the information and 'facts' of layoff events in the organizations (van Dijk, 1993). Accordingly, they have an opportunity to enforce their statements and argumentations by those 'facts' and communicate them through an undisputable discourse. Thus, management possesses a solid political position, which colors its relation with the other actors that involve in this practice and classifies them as allies and opponents.

However, while the analysis did not clarify a direct opposite stance of any actor, HRM and unions are clearly depicted as allies to the management through the three discourses. With regard to HRM, it basically emerges through the rationalistic discourse as an executive arm of the organizations' financial strategies, but without

direct attention to the employees' questions. The unions, in turn, in line with their traditional stance, as they are not used to challenge the employers (Lundh, 2004), they demonstrate mainly through the humanistic discourse in a routinely negotiations context without an obvious resistant action. On the contrary, in some situations they shared the rationalistic discourse with the management.

Nonetheless, this alliance relationship between HRM and unions on one hand and the management on the other; could not reflect the real and individualistic stance of the employees, since their direct voice was completely absent. Arguably, thus, it could be assumed that the emergence of an individual voice of the employees, particularly the affected ones, might be emerged a kind of resistant reaction to layoffs practice. Moreover, it could be argued that the news texts neglect for the probable resistant discourse(s) on the layoffs highlighted it as a normal, acceptable and legitimate managerial practice (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Accordingly, it turns out that the news texts discourses on layoffs tend to give an acceptability sense to this managerial practice, however, these discourses, in subtle ways, constrained some other actors (ibid).

7.5. The limitations

Firstly, according to the subjectivity characteristics of the CDA approach (Wood & Kroger, 2000) the qualitative interpretation of the empirical material of this study may color with the author's opinions since it is difficult for her to be completely isolated from it.

In addition, the empirical data was collected from only two newspapers which might not be enough and good representatives of the Swedish news texts. Furthermore, to conduct this linguistic critical analysis was a great challenge for me as none native Swedish speaker since the material was in Swedish. This factor, thus, probably limited the interpretation of some aspects of the news texts coverage of the studied phenomenon.

8. Conclusion

Drawing on the critical discourse analysis, this thesis contributed to the existing critical research on organizational change by providing insights into two Swedish newspapers discourses on the layoff practice, and the social realities that emerged through theses discourses. Moreover, the thesis described the representation of the Swedish newspapers of the HRM activities during layoff events. These insights clarified the discursive practices and interpretations that the selected newspapers use in order to communicate this management practice to the public and their implications.

The selected newspapers, through a matter-of-fact coverage, frame layoffs, mostly, as a rational and inevitable action that must be conducted when it regards the cost reductions, in order to maintain and enhance the organizations. Accordingly, news texts highlight the domination of this rationalistic discourse and the humanistic and nationalistic discourses emerged as are subordinated it. Thus, it could be argued that the discourses on layoffs in the two newspapers support the three large organizations in enhancing their capitalistic power and hegemony by framing this practice as a taken-for-granted action. Through these discourses and framings, the newspaper articles urge the employees, as well as the society to accept layoffs practice as an integral part of organizational life. Thus, the newspapers, in this case, help in articulating and supporting a kind of power relations (van Dijk, 1993) between the different actors, where the newspapers discourse and the organizations' top management occupy a hegemonic position and the other actors are subject to them.

Furthermore, the news articles frame the role of HRM in handling layoffs events from a narrow scope which is limited to its role in downsizing the employees to enhance the financial position of the organizations. However, there is no discussion in the news texts about HRM role towards the employees, such as coping strategies or coaching programs. Therefore, the findings of this thesis could be used by HR practitioners to make a balance of their position in organizations between their intertwined responsibilities towards the employer and the employees. Additionally, while they use the media to explain why organization adopts layoffs practice, they can also use it to clarify how they deal with the employees under those critical circumstances.

Finally, for more nuance critical interpretation of the media coverage of layoffs practice in the Swedish context, the same study could be conducted by using a larger number of various newspapers. Moreover, a comparative critical study could be made by using different cases within different sectors on the local level. Furthermore, the media coverage of layoffs events could be studied by employing the neutral type of discourse analysis (DA) (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) which could give the phenomenon a more societal dimension.

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Appendix 1:

The excerpts from the news articles in Swedish:

1. "Vi är ett världsledande företag på en väldigt tuff marknad."
2. (1.550 jobb bort på Ericsson)
3. "nya nedskärningar väntade"
4. (Facket har redan börjat förhandla med ledningen om hur neddragningarna ska genomföras).
5. "I dag har vi inga planer på att säga upp heltidsanställa."
6. "Nu har vi princip sagt upp alla tillfälligt anställda i Sverige".
7. "Vi är beredda göra det som behövs, så länge det är rimligt."
8. (Volvo lämnar en rapport med besvikelser över hela linjen. Tappet för order, vinst, försäljning och lönsamhet var sämre än väntat. Nu flaggar bolaget för nya neddragningar)
9. (Telekomjätten Ericsson ska skära ned med 1.550 jobb i Sverige. Åtgärderna tas för att minska kostnaderna och öka effektiviteten, skriver bolaget i ett pressmeddelande).
10. (En SAS-konkurs hade varit värre än de neddragningar som nu står för dörren i den aviserade sparplanen)
11. "Det som händer i vår omvärld styr vi inte över. Det vi kan kontrollera själva som företag är våra kostnader, därför är det oerhört viktigt att vi hela tiden ser över dem"
12. "För att behålla vårt teknologiska ledarskap och säkra konkurrenskraft i den tuffa konkurrensen måste vi se över våra kostnader".
13. "För att kunna säkerställa att vi kan fortsätta genomföra vår strategi, bibehålla vårt marknadsledarskap, investera i FoU och möta våra kunders behov måste vi kontinuerligt driva effektivitet och sänka våra kostnader".
14. "För att SAS besparingsprogrammet ska lyckas på lång sikt måste det kombineras med en offensiv strategi och nedskärningar".
15. "Den svaga försäljningen tvingar Volvo PV att i höst minska produktionstakten i Torslandafabriken i Göteborg. Som en konsekvens får 200-300 personer som har hyrts in från bemanningsföretag inte sina kontrakt förlängda".
16. (AB Volvo har fördubblat det antal bemanningsanställda som måste lämna företagets fabrik i Skövde. Volvo-"Orsaken till personalminskningen är den vikande försäljningen av lastbilar).
17. "Företag som Ericsson bygger ut i delar av världen där deras marknader växer och har då dragit ner sitt antal anställda här i Sverige"

18. ” Den utvecklingen kommer att fortsätta. Jag ser fortsatta rationaliseringar, omorganisationer med mera i företaget som gör att kostnaderna kommer ned”
19. ”Vi måste minska antalet anställda för att komma ned i kostnadskostym”.
20. (Hård kritik kan riktas mot hur fackföreningar genom åren blockerat nödvändiga förändringar, därför att man agerat som om företaget var odödligt och mer till för de anställda än kunderna)
21. (Förhandlingar med de fackliga organisationerna på Ericsson om hur neddragningarna ska genomföras har påbörjats)
22. (Köpenhamnsförhandlingarna under helgen är slutet på de senaste dagarnas dramatik där SAS-ledningen hotat med att begära företaget i konkurs)
23. ”Det är det enda ledningen talar om, men det finns andra alternativ. Här framstår det som att man använder konkursen som en påtryckning för att få de fackliga förbunden att gå med på villkoren”.
24. ”Jag har sagt till mina medlemmar att det bästa vi kan göra är att se till att produktionen rullar”.
25. ” Vi har varit informerade fortlöpande om planen och dess tänkta innehåll”.
26. ”För oss är det viktigaste att cheferna är på plats när den här typen av besked lämnas till våra anställda”
27. (i mars 2013 kan personalen få individuella besked om vilka som berörs av neddragningarna).
28. ”Det här tar energi från medarbetarna som blir stressade och tappar fokus trots att de måste fortsätta jobba för att öka lönsamheten”
29. ”Förutom uppsägningar finns det mycket annat som kan förändras för de anställda”.
30. ”Sverige kommer att vara en oerhört viktig plattform för Ericsson även framgent”.
31. ”Vi strävar mot svenska företags långsiktiga överlevnad och välbestånd.”
32. ”Vi är jättenöjda att SAS fortsätter, beroende på att SAS är en hubb för skandinavisk luftfartstrafik. Det är jätteviktigt för tillväxten”.