UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

HR: THE ISOLATED ISLAND

Collaboration and visibility, a way to the organization's heart?

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Thesis:	30hp
Program:	Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour Relations
Level:	Second Cycle
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Supervisor:	Petra Adolfsson
Examiner:	Stefan Tengblad

ABSTRACT

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Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how an HR department could gain legitimacy for themselves while undergoing a reorganization of the department. This reorganization was affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic that enforced changes in how the organization was working by imposing remote work.

Theory: This thesis follows Suchman's (1995) framework for organizational legitimacy, which offers strategies for gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy. Although, this thesis mainly focuses on gaining strategies as the HR department was implementing new processes and strategies that focused on becoming more centered in the organization. This theory enabled the authors to further analyze the collected data by categorizing it between the various legitimacy strategies.

Method: This thesis was conducted as a qualitative case study, which consisted of 15 semi-structured interviews and two observations during the HR department's meetings. All interviews were conducted with members of the HR team remotely using a video communication tool. The data were transcribed and coded using thematic analysis to understand the themes that emerged during the interviews.

Result: The empirical findings showed that the HR department had gained legitimacy in various ways throughout the reorganization of the department. The findings revealed that the process of gaining legitimacy started prior to the reorganization, however, the process was boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic sped up the implementation of remote work and increased meetings between the members of the department cross-contexts. Conclusively, becoming more visible and increasing collaboration with managers as well as other departments were key factors to gain legitimacy. Adhering to societal HR trends, distancing themselves from the depiction of traditional HR, and implementing agile working methods all contributed to the department's gained legitimacy.

FOREWORD

We would like to thank the case organization for being so helpful, kind, and patient with us throughout the process of this thesis. Additionally, we would like to thank our supervisor Petra Adolfsson for always having a positive attitude as well as assisting us and making the process as easy as possible.

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1. Introduction

The year 2020 was a peculiar year for people all over the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some faced challenges such as layoffs, union negotiations, and profit losses there were organizations that benefited from the turbulent times (Market Capitalization Loss, 2020; Tucker, 2020). Services such as Zoom, Amazon, Shopify, Microsoft, and Netflix among many other organizations offering services online boomed due to limited social contact resulting in people relying more on services online (Prospering in the pandemic, 2020). Additionally, in an effort to limit the spread of the virus and continue conducting business, organizations implemented remote working methods (Contreras et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2010).

The novelty of the pandemic and its effects provide a great ground for research due to its ambiguity in the context it is investigated. Therefore, this thesis aims to investigate how HR professionals are gaining legitimacy from their perspective while undergoing a departmental reorganization as well as how COVID-19 has influenced that process. Moreover, the case organization implemented an agile framework to aid in the reorganization, thus it became an important part of this thesis. Previous studies show that HR has struggled with legitimacy for a long time due to how others in management perceive the profession (Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2019). Thus, creating a discrepancy between the departments as the definition of HR remains unclear. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance and functions of the HR department faced changes as organizations encountered new challenges (Caligiuri et. al., 2020). Additionally, the agile framework could assist in managing change and crisis situations by creating a structure within the teams as well as promoting collaboration between them (Cohen, Lindvall & Costa, 2004; Sommer, 2019).

Conclusively, this thesis aimed to investigate the legitimacy of an HR department from their own perspective while attempting to contribute to the research gap mentioned by Drori and Honig (2013). The research gap presented by Drori and Honig (2013) highlighted the lack of legitimacy research within the HR department while taking cultural aspects into consideration.

1.1 Background

This section offers an explanation of the historical background regarding the current state of the HR profession related to legitimacy as well as reorganizing the department and the trends of renaming it. Moreover, an explanation of the global COVID-19 pandemic and its effects is presented.

1.1.1 HR trends. HR has been considered semi-legitimate and have had to continuously fight for their strategic role within an organization (Higgins & Lo, 2018). Thus resulting in varying opinions of what their core tasks, aims, and motivations are within the field. In a survey conducted by a consultancy firm, 60% of executives across multiple organizations perceive HR as an administrative function. Furthermore, seven in ten HR executives and four in five CEOs believe that HR should reinvent themselves to be able to respond to the future needs of organizations and employees (The Future of HR, 2020). This becomes prominent when three in five HR executives believe that the profession will rapidly become irrelevant unless they develop (Future of HR 2020, 2019). The ongoing conversation regarding the change of HR highlights the importance of being flexible in an ever-changing field. Generally, it has been impacted by generational changes as the differences between them have become more prominent when younger generations such as Generation Z enter the labor market with differing values and expectations from the previous generations (Kron & Wallgren, 2016). Furthermore, these differences are enhanced by technological changes and globalization. Traditionally, the tasks of attracting new employees as well as retaining and developing the existing employees at the organization become HR's responsibility. Conclusively, previous research has shown that HR must go through a dramatic journey of change and preferably remain ever-changing in order to obtain relevancy and maintain a strategic image and position (Kron & Wallgren, 2016; Thorén, 2016; Mathsson, 2016). However, in relation to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, HR's role has been in focus and relied on in order to make challenging decisions resulting in fundamental changes in the way the organization operates. The function has been responsible for ensuring continuity of the development of a sustainable way of a *new normal* which entails increasing remote work, and led to the general recognition of what they can achieve (Dennert, 2021). Furthermore, as a result of these developments, the prevailing belief that HR is mostly an administrative profession was debunked when 88% of the respondents of executives in a study agreed that HR played a prominent role in the response to the crisis (The Future of HR, 2020).

Additionally, reorganizing the HR department and the roles within it appear to be an ongoing trend through multiple job advertisements and blog posts by professionals, discussing this emerging phenomenon. The reorganization often seems to become apparent through re-naming the department and the roles belonging within it with the main focus of distancing themselves from being viewed as a resource rather than people. There are different varieties of new names for the department which usually stem from *People* being the keyword with additions of *Culture, Organization,* and *Team* (Chan, 2020; People, 2021; Greenhouse, 2021; People and Culture Generalist, 2021; Seiter, 2017). Although this topic has not yet been widely researched within the HR field, evidence from other departments undergoing similar restructurations shows efforts to portray their department in a different light. The aim for renaming and rebranding departments have been to reflect the changes and goals through attracting the desired audiences. In doing so, selecting a name that reflects and emphasizes their disciplinary developments as well as their desire to convey modernity and relevance are vital (Winkler, 2014).

1.1.2 The COVID-19 pandemic. The novel virus SARS-CoV-2 also known as the COVID-19 pandemic originated in Wuhan, China, and was identified in late 2019. The virus spread like wildfire within months around the globe causing unexpected and unsettling chaos. The virus has not only affected the health of the individual and society as a whole but has also had a massive effect on organizations worldwide (Johansson & Wenklo, 2020)**.**

In an effort to reduce the spread of the virus public contact was limited by closing down schools, gyms, nightclubs, museums, and other businesses that entailed a big group of people getting together (Coronavirus: Northern Italy, 2020). During this time Sweden discovered its first case of the virus on the 31st of January, 2020 in Jönköping. The first precautions taken were on the 11th of March, 2020. Following, on the 16th of March, 2020, non-essential workers were recommended to operate remotely if possible to reduce the spread of the virus at workplaces (Arbete hemma, 2020; Tänk över om resan, 2020; Ministry of Justice, 2020; Ministry of Justice, 2021). Alternatively, employers could apply for a short-term working allowance to lower personnel costs via reducing employees' working hours instead of laying them off (Business Region Gothenburg, 2020; For Employers, 2021). Furthermore, organizations have had the possibility to apply for reductions in payroll taxes, advances in tax refunds from 2019, support based on the possible loss of financial turnover, and financial aid for sick pay for employees among other financial support such as deferred payments for permit fees and discounted parking fees (Gothenburg, 2020). Companies worldwide implemented new ways of working to combat the spread of the virus The new way of working entailed becoming digital or dying (Brandt, n.d.). In order to continue social distancing and working remotely, organizations had to adapt to a digital way of conducting business as usual as the crisis accelerated everything (Brandt, n.d.).

1.2 Research Questions and Aim

Human Resources has been considered a semi-legitimate profession and has therefore struggled with how it has been perceived both within the department as well as generally in the organization. Going through a reorganization of the HR department while simultaneously battling this struggle can provide new insight into how legitimacy is created and upheld. While the reorganization is redirecting resources and creating change, the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects offer great ground for research as extensive investigation of HR's legitimacy during change has only been conducted to a limited extent due to it being a new phenomenon. To further investigate this phenomenon, the following research questions were formulated:

1. **How can HR professionals gain legitimacy from their own perspective during a reorganization?**
2. **How does the COVID-19 pandemic influence HR legitimacy work?**

Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to research the possibility to gain legitimacy for the HR department while going through a reorganization affected by an ongoing global pandemic.

1.3 Disposition

To investigate HR's legitimacy, first, relevant previous research is presented to better understand the fields of HR, Legitimacy, and the Agile framework. Further, the theoretical framework of the thesis is introduced followed by a methodology chapter expanding on the approach of the thesis. Thereafter a chapter with empirical findings is presented followed by an analysis chapter that combines the findings and theoretical framework to clarify the connections between the obtained data and Suchman's (1995) theory. Finally, a discussion including connections to previous research, limitations, and connection to research questions are demonstrated followed by a concluding chapter to summarize the findings of the thesis.

2. Previous Studies

In this chapter, the authors explore crisis management from the perspective of managers while taking the global COVID-19 pandemic into consideration as well as present previous studies relating to the subjects. Furthermore, the legitimacy of HR is investigated through studies relating to HR legitimacy within the department itself, within the organizations as well as from a societal perspective. Additionally, change management and modern HR are reflected in the chapter exploring the Agile working methods first from a more general perspective and then in relation to HR specifically. Finally, to conclude the previous studies section, relevant gaps within the presented studies are highlighted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the possible contributions of this thesis.

2.1 Handling the Crisis: Management Perspective

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, national recommendations for organizations were implemented to shift into remote work and avoid public contact as much as possible (Caligiuri et. al., 2020; Arbete hemma, 2020). The crisis of COVID-19 has compelled organizations to operate as remotely as possible and in turn, enforced the management to make changes due to the resulting new ways of operating differently than what they are used to (Caligiuri et. al., 2020). Furthermore, Trainor and Veloitti (2013) mention in their symposium that Kielkowski claims that effective leadership in crisis situations begins before the crisis itself and is a result of effective, responsive, and structured leadership.

The power struggle between the departments and the crucial part that HR has, in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, need to be addressed in order for the organization to move forward accordingly to engage in effective crisis management (Trainor & Veloitti, 2013). There are incident and corporation-specific methods that aim to clarify what has happened during a crisis to organizational members as well as why the company is reacting in a specific way. Furthermore, Leung and Lam (2008) emphasize that global crises' such as SARS and in this case, COVID-19, are very difficult to prepare for fully as they are unexpected and difficult to predict, however, it is management's responsibility to prepare as much as possible. As mentioned earlier, in crisis situations, managers are in charge of important preventive, reactive, and recovery-oriented methods of crisis management (Leung & Lam, 2008), moreover, Caligiuri et. al. (2020), note that it is vital for the organization's future, to make sure that the current leadership is capable of forecasting and retaining competent leaders in order for them to be able to tackle a crisis when it arises.

2.2 The Concept of Remote Work

The development of technology since the 1950s has allowed various remote working methods to emerge and evolve. Throughout the years, the concept evolved from telecommuting to virtual work (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Although the researchers have speculated regarding what the future might hold for virtual work, the present technology has enabled white-collar workers to begin this journey already (Benhamou, 2018; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). The term virtual work entails utilizing online platforms and the available technology to carry out work tasks, which in turn has enabled people to work remotely away from the office. This has become evident through the increased number of people using communication tools such as Zoom Video Communications and Microsoft Teams to interact with colleagues (Gallacher & Hossain, 2020; Richter, 2021; Zhang et. al., 2021). Moreso, when government officials such as the Public Health Agency of Sweden recommended organizations shift to remote work if possible. Consequently, the official's recommendations together with the technological advancements have enabled more people to work remotely, oftentimes from home (Tänk över om resan, 2021).

Shifting towards remote work imposes many challenges that the organization and the HR department must handle in order to continue work as usual. These challenges include ensuring that the employees are well equipped to work remotely as well as being able to monitor their performances in a different context than the office (Khanna & New, 2008; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). Oftentimes managers at the organizations employ the help of the HR professionals to advise them regarding performance management which has become more prominent during change and the shift towards remote work. Consequently, HR professionals are placed in a position where they not only need to consider the employer's perspective but also take the employees' needs into account (Jeske, 2021). This can be done by using monitoring software that tracks keyboard strokes, e-mail use, or phone calls. Moreover, software such as Zoom, Microsoft Team, and Google Meet enabled monitoring employees' online activity as well as playing a part in simplifying communication (Jeske, 2021). However, establishing the same level of communication as at the office has become challenging, thus organizations must actively work towards assuring and maintaining the existing communication patterns (Khanna & New, 2008; Mello, 2007; Raiborn & Butler, 2009). In doing so, organizations must conform to both work tasks and their culture to enable employees to perform as usual while also boosting team morale. Communication plays an important role in upholding the team mentality, therefore it becomes the organizations' responsibility to guarantee employees become familiar with new tools and have a clear description of what tasks are possible to be performed remotely. Moreover, employees' and team morale requires special attention to continue work as usual. This can be attained through implementing collaborative techniques such as video conferencing and frequent meetings in order to avoid feelings of isolation (Ferreira, 2021; Jeske, 2021; Mello, 2007; Müller & Niessen, 2019).

Additionally, it is of importance for HR professionals to revisit, update and add to existing policies considering most current policies have been tailored to guide on-site work. Through examination of these emerging issues, HR will be able to anticipate and prepare policies for the future of remote work. Moreover, by embracing HR professionals' strategic stance where they track changes and identify knowledge gaps rather than viewing them as administrator guardians of the procedure, the organization prepares for possible upcoming changes (Jeske, 2021). Moreover, scholars have argued that the organization's ability to implement remote work becomes vital for their survival and ability to compete (Contreras et al., 2020; Khanna & New, 2008).

2.3 Agile Working Methods

An Agile trend emerged in the fast-moving IT industry to combat the challenges of focusing on the human and social aspects of work as well as to keep up with competitors and new technical innovations (Hoda, Noble, & Marshall, 2013). It has become vital for organizations to adopt a strategy that is flexible and adaptable to rapid changes in order to remain competitive in the market (Andersson, & Steen Aune 2020; Nagel & Dove, 1991), thus, forcing organizations to implement new ways of working to bring value as well as enhance customer satisfaction. In doing so, organizations have increased teamwork within departments as well as across them to improve collaboration and communication. The Agile framework also has introduced a variety of models of meetings, workshops, and presentations to create unity within the organization and become more receptive to change (Cohen, Lindvall & Costa, 2004; Sommer, 2019). However, agile as a working strategy has received some backlash as Waldron (2017) highlights the importance of considering the individuals' characteristics when adopting the practices arguing that although an agile approach is flexible and adaptable it requires people to be dynamic, enmeshed, and social which in some cases may not suit everybody. Overcoming these challenges could require offering various training opportunities for the employees to help them understand and become familiar with the agile working methods. Moreover, as an organization attempts to become more agile, all involved departments go through the same process of implementing agile working methods in an attempt to become more unified. The dissonance between the sense of belonging to a team while also collaborating across departments may result in difficulties regarding the sense of identity within the original team (Waldron, 2017).

Parallel to the growing trend of implementing agile working methods into various departments, HR is slowly but surely becoming one of them (Capelli & Tavis, 2018; Creelman, 2020; Kavitha & Suresh, 2021; McMackin & Heffernan, inpress). The implications of implementing agile working methods within HR are both positive and negative. The agile practices imply increasing teamwork, multi-directional feedback for teams, utilizing cross-functional hiring requisitions, and simplify the performance review process amongst other improvements (Capelli & Tavis, 2018; Denning, 2018). Further research suggests that management trends such as agile transformation which are affecting organizational structures and behaviors may lead to increased legitimacy for the HR department (Abrahamson, 1996; Nilander & Junefelt, 2019). Although the implementation of agile working methods presents various advantages some challenges may also arise such as traditional skills becoming outdated and obsolete thus requiring reskilling. Additionally, the transformation entails a shift from focusing on the individual within the team to the needs of the entirety of the team, resulting in a greater challenge for managers and the organization as a whole (Capelli & Tavis, 2018). Moreover, previous studies suggest that one of the most prominent challenges HR faces in regard to agile transformation is the process of evolving the organizational culture as it has been suggested that it is the starting point to becoming an agile organization. This challenge of evolving, spreading, and maintaining a common organizational culture has traditionally been HR's responsibility which becomes heightened when implementing a new working method (Bhatta & Thrite, 2019).

2.4 The Evolution of HR Legitimacy

Caligiuri et. al (2020), found that the crisis of COVID-19 has had multiple implications on the work of the HR department when dealing with stress management, training, and flexible work arrangements (Caligiuri et. al, 2020). In addition, in a thesis by Johansson and Wenklo (2020), the importance of structures in a crisis situation was elaborated within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Human Resource Management department is expected to obtain several traits such as integrity, communication skills, empathy, conflict resolution, and ethical consideration for others in order to establish and maintain the trust and respect from the line managers as well as the employees (Brown et. al., 2009; Lo et. al., 2015). Through these traits and competencies, HR is expected to add value to the business by connecting people, technology, aligning strategy, culture, practices, and behavior, as well as sustaining change (Lo et al., 2015). As mentioned, communication skills are of importance as the knowledge within the department must be shared as it is vital to the organization considering it has the power to unify not only the departments but the entire organization as a whole. In turn, this strengthens HR's position and could give the department more power since the knowledge can be considered critical and scarce for the organization. Moreover, this results in the remaining departments becoming more dependent on HR's knowledge as well as bringing unity to the organization which could bring HR further legitimacy (Heizmann, 2011; Tregaskis, 2003).

Moreover, Lo et. al. (2015) discusses how in order for HR to gain support, necessary legitimacy as well as successfully implementing HR initiatives they must consider the varying perspectives of the organization's stakeholders that often may lead to conflicting interests. By considering other employees' interests HR is able to create and maintain credibility in the eyes of employees and line managers as well as create long term benefits for the organization as a whole in the form of employee engagement, productivity, and retention (Brown et. al., 2009; Caligiuri et. al., 2020; Lo et. al., 2015). However, HR's ability to create value for multiple stakeholders has been questioned in relation to whether they can maintain the image of being employee champions as well as administrative experts simultaneously (Heizmann & Fox, 2017). Moreover, as HR has become more strategic, Capelli (2015) believes HR must consider that the organization's strategic aims are set on a short-term basis to adapt to the changing needs of the organization and its environment, whereas HR has traditionally worked with long-term goals. Additionally, Cappelli (2015) claims that HR's responsibilities consist of long-term goals such as developing talent, building and establishing corporate culture, addressing morale problems as well as managing regulations discrepancies between the leadership team's expectations of quick results and HR's longitudinal working methods have resulted in inconsistencies with the delivered results (Cappelli, 2015). This plays into the transformation HR has been going through since the 1980s to become a more strategic partner within the organization. The shift in HR's role, in turn, has affected not only HR's tasks but also how they are perceived within the organization (Cappelli, 2015; Collin et. al., 2017; Heizmann & Fox 2017; Ulrich et. al., 2012; Ulrich, 2015). The tasks of HR practitioners are crucial to be balanced as they affect the organization's employees' perception of the department thus creating a paradox on how much power the HR department has within the organization (Tregaskis, 2003; Heizmann & Fox, 2011). The duality in the role of an HR practitioner compels them into multiple fields where tasks overlap with managers' thus making the lines of HR ambiguous. The consequences of said ambiguity have resulted in HR having to fight for their power as equal managers at the organization where they are expected to be strategic managers as well as having a responsibility for the operational employees (Guest & King, 2004). Moreover, research shows that when any ambiguous party lacks power they strive to remove tensions that in turn affect the power relations between organizational departments. When these conflicts arise, the ambiguous party tries to solve them with the aim to increase their power (Levina & Orlikowski, 2008).

There have been multiple studies on Human Resource Management's role as a strategic partner within an organization and whether the department should be considered legitimate or not (Higgins & Lo, 2018). Since HRM was established as a department it has been qualified as a semi-legitimate profession and in turn, resulted in the department struggling with legitimacy within their organizations and work tasks (Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Mahadevan & Schmitz, 2020). Additionally, Lees (2006) claims that in order for the HRM department to be considered as legitimate as a strategic partner they need to consider how they are perceived from the outside perspective as well as how to incorporate the social and cultural environment into the organization's actions. Higgins and Lo (2018) add to the conversation by emphasizing the stability and control of work. Stability and equal treatment throughout the organization improve the HR department's legitimacy by creating a fair perception of them. Additionally, the authors believe that local principles of employment regulations and norms may contribute to practices globally within an organization to further promote control and unity or tasks (Higgins & Lo, 2018).

Moreover, if managers' and employees' perception of the HR department is not consistent, a risk exists where the employees at the organization develop behaviors and attitudes that go against the organization's goals and in turn may jeopardize the effectiveness of the HR department's practices (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Wang et. al., 2021). Therefore, Wang et. al., (2021) also highlighted that the strength of the HR department contributes to how they are perceived in the organization between managers and employees. As Heizmann and Fox (2017) mention in their research HR has continuously fought to gain a more strategic influence within their professional roles. Although, as it states in the article it has not been well received by other departments and could result in a power struggle within the organization (Heizmann & Fox, 2017).

2.5 Legitimacy within the HR department

Drori and Honig (2013) investigated legitimacy in an organization through an external perspective where the actors lending legitimacy exists outside the organization, as well as internal perspective, meaning the actors within the organization. The authors claim that gaining legitimacy through the external perspective requires endorsements from the external stakeholders in regard to achieving internal objectives. Internal legitimacy is gained when consensus between internal stakeholders accepts and validates an organizational strategy thus reinforcing as well as mobilizing the actors to work towards a common strategic objective (Drori & Honig, 2013).

Multiple scholars have been researching the legitimacy of a department to obtain a better understanding of how legitimacy is achieved. The legitimacy of a department has often been explored from both an external and internal standpoint to gain a comprehensive image of the department (Deephouse, Bundy, Plunkett & Suchman, 2017). Deephouse et. al. (2017) found that these two perspectives are interconnected and support one another, furthermore, Park et. al. (2011) perceive legitimacy as an exchange of common values between the organizations and their sources of legitimacy. Additionally, Sandholtz (2020) discussed the internal and external aspects of HR's legitimacy, meaning how both the organizational members as well as relevant actors outside the organization perceive and affect the HR department's work. However, Drori and Honig (2013) noted that at times external legitimacy may even undermine internal legitimacy due to external actors attempting to gain legitimacy for themselves instead of lending it to others. Although, internally within an organization, a department may gain and lend legitimacy to others to together achieve the organization's goals (Park et. al., 2011). Therefore, Drori and Honig (2013) highlighted the importance of investigating internal legitimacy to find the best practices for the department in question by exploring the department's practices and logic independent from the organization.

Furthermore, Park et. al. (2011) note that legitimacy within an organization is dependent on the social framework established between the members. Thus, how the actors collaborate together and structure their work affects their legitimacy. For a department to gain legitimacy it must consider its accountability for its tasks while also taking the other departments' interests into account. Additionally, the collaboration between departments affects the party's legitimacy through their willingness to collaborate and lend support to one another. These not only affect the individual departments' legitimacy but also influence the organizations' performance, which in turn may increase departments' legitimacy (Park et. al., 2011). Similarly, Drori and Honig (2013) explored internal legitimacy and emphasized the importance of organizational members acknowledging and accepting the organization's strategy as well as ethical and ideological vision in order for all parties to become valid. Furthermore, Park et. al. (2012) added that the extent to which the internal stakeholders within an organization lend support and legitimacy is reflected in the collaborations and how well the departments relate to one another and their goals. Sandholtz (2020) explored internal legitimacy through the exchanges between the department seeking legitimacy and the actors it collaborated with. The author also noted that legitimating efforts often go unnoticed until the department attempts to decouple from them which may result in detrimental effects for both the department and the organization at large (Sandholtz, 2020).

2.6 Research Gaps and Relevance

The authors of various aforementioned studies have identified research gaps and suggestions for future research. This thesis attempts to further investigate the topics to address some relevant research gaps. Caligiuri et. al. (2020) explored the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on working life, however, they suggested that the outcomes of post-pandemic work should be further investigated to shed light on global uncertainty and redefining organizational performance. Similarly, Higgings and Lo (2018) suggested discussing the global work and values that transcend national borders to further examine whether a global identity is emerging in the field of HR. As a result of global work and the pandemic, remote work has increased (Arbete hemma, 2020). In regard to remote work, Khanna and New (2008) recommended studying the effect of reduced face-to-face interactions and its effect on teamwork. Flexible methods were also investigated by McMackin and Heffernan (in press), who investigated the agile framework, suggesting further looking into the relationship between performance and HR flexibility as well as the importance of HR operating according to a specific strategy or model. Furthermore, this thesis aims to dive deeper into HR legitimacy within the department. Additionally, Lo et. al. (2015) brought up the possible benefits of researching HR legitimacy while also taking into account other stakeholders, such as managers and unions, to better understand the position and perceptions of HR. Due to these varying research gaps, this thesis has investigated the possibility for HR to gain legitimacy during a reorganization affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which touches upon some of the research gaps presented.

3. Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach of this thesis is presented in this episode to dive further into the phenomenon of how to gain, maintain and repair legitimacy in a professional setting. This is explored through a case study of an HR department at a global organization undergoing a reorganization renewing the definition and function of HR in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suchman's (1995) *Maintaining Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches* framework is utilized in the theoretical approach to investigate various aspects of legitimacy and their implications for an organization. Additionally, aspects from *Organizational Legitimacy: Six Key Questions* by Deephouse et. al. (2017) are combined with Suchman's (1995) theory to create a comprehensive framework for this thesis. Although, both Deephouse et. al. (2017) and Suchman (1995) study legitimacy from an external perspective, legitimacy investigations have also been conducted solely within the department, meaning only actors within the department have been included in the study to better understand their perceptions on how they create value and view themselves in the organization. Sandholtz (2012), as well as Park et. al. (2011), investigated legitimacy within a department by utilizing the Suchman (1995) framework, which has shown that this framework is applicable for such research regardless of its original intentions.

3.1 Organizational Legitimacy

Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p.574). Where the entity refers to the organization or department attempting to gain legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). Suchman (1995) suggests three primary strategies for legitimacy work, which are gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy. This thesis mainly focuses on gaining strategies which will be further explored below in chapter *3.2 Gaining Legitimacy.* The other two aspects, maintaining and repairing, support the first dimension, therefore they have also been briefly included in the framework. According to Suchman (1995) maintaining legitimacy is perceived as easier than gaining and repairing legitimacy because once it is gained it tends to be taken for granted and become mindless. But most importantly, the routines, as well as activities around legitimation often happen automatically. However, the most secure and legitimate organizations can have their legitimacy status threatened by anomalies, miscues, information failure, innovations, and external shocks. Thus, the third group of legitimacy strategies focuses on repairing and reacting to the effects of unforeseen crises and unfortunate happenings. These crises affect entities that have become enmeshed in their own legitimating myths and activities thus failing to notice decreasing support from its sources (Suchman, 1995).

Additionally, Suchman (1995) suggested three perspectives under each main strategy, which are pragmatic, moral, and cognitive-based. Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the sources of legitimacy aiming to serve their own interests through exchanges with the entity (Deephouse et. al., 2017; Suchman, 1995). Sources of legitimacy are considered to be all influencing actors such as people, documents, the media, and society at large (Deephouse et. al., 2017). The entity aims to serve the sources' wellbeing by incorporating the sources' policy-making structures and altering their own personality to reflect the values of the source (Suchman, 1995). Whereas moral legitimacy refers to what is the right thing to do, meaning that rather than serving a self-interest or exchanging favors, legitimacy is gained by serving the welfare of the sources' constructed value systems. The legitimacy is gained through a morally valuable structure and identity rather than placing scrutiny on accomplishments (Deephouse et. al., 2017; Suchman, 1995). Cognitive legitimacy is based on either affirmative backing or acceptance of the entity which is necessary or inevitable based on taken-for-granted cultural account (Suchman, 1995). When a common cultural model exists, entities become more predictable, meaningful, and inviting through their episodic actions (Deephouse et. al., 2017; Suchman, 1995).

3.2 Gaining Legitimacy

When new activity commences or a pre-existing one is modified, an entity faces the challenge to become valid and a considerable actor within its social order and, in other words, gain legitimacy. This endeavor to gain legitimacy consists of two main challenges. First, the entity must take into account their position within the larger context they operate in. The challenge forms if the entity as a whole is poorly institutionalized within the established sector, thus lacking integration in regard to new activities it is performing. When the entity as an actor is already established, the challenge becomes to legitimize certain activities or to decouple new activities from existing assumptions. Alternatively, if no established sector or context of operations yet exists, it becomes the entity's encumbrance to build the context or sector from the ground up. In doing so, the entity aims to establish a context independent from other pre-existing conditions and into which new entrants, later on, may enter (Suchman, 1995).

The second challenge adds to the first by taking into consideration the sources and alliances of either the new entrant or the entity aiming to create a new context to succeed in.

The challenge to overcome becomes either creating new alliances and sources or convincing already legitimate entities to lend their support and legitimacy (Suchman, 1995). To position oneself within a context and pre-existing entities in a desirable manner, Suchman (1995) proposes three main strategies for gaining legitimacy through organizational change and persuasive communication. Namely, the strategies are conforming to the preexisting environment, selecting a new more favorable environment. and manipulating the pre-existing environment. Each of these strategies consists of multiple subcategories which can be further divided into pragmatic, moral, and cognitive strategies (Suchman, 1995).

3.2.1 Gaining pragmatic legitimacy. Gaining pragmatic legitimacy entails the entity conforming to the already pre-existing environment they operate in. To achieve this, the entity may conform to the pre-existing needs of its various sources demonstrating congruence, thus legitimizing the entity through meeting the source's needs. Alternatively, building the entity's reputation among its sources may enhance the sources' favorable perceptions of the entity. By enhancing the reputation, the entity aims to build a repertoire of activities or people who project a strong and knowledgeable image of the entity. In order to consider reputation bulging as a successful and worthy endeavor, an established record of consistent performance is required (Suchman, 1995).

If conforming to the environment does not produce favorable results due to differences in values, beliefs, or prevailing norms, a less common but abundant strategy is to manipulate the existing environment to the entity's needs and benefit. When implementing new practices, it becomes the entity's responsibility to proclaim new explanations of the social reality bypassing the existing cultural and social beliefs and norms. In doing so, the entity engages in activities of creating new realities through modifying sources' beliefs and norms, often by enlisting the help of the sources. Manipulating the environment is most manageable through pragmatic changes as pragmatic refers to direct exchanges with the sources. Such manipulation comes into effect by advertising the entity's products and image to relevant sources by highlighting the exchanges and the value the entity is able to create for the sources through those pragmatic exchanges (Suchman, 1995).

3.2.2. Gaining moral legitimacy. An entity can opt to gain legitimacy through catering to the source's moral and ethically based needs instead of offering direct pragmatic exchanges. To conform to one's environment based on moral standards, the entity must conform to the sources and surrounding entities' principled ideals. Producing concrete outcomes through morally admirable actions often becomes the most straightforward strategy. By producing proper outcomes, the entity aims to satisfy sources' needs, comparably to the aforementioned pragmatic strategy. However, measuring the moral value of an outcome may be difficult to attain or document, therefore rendering this strategy a tedious and disadvantageous one. Alternatively, an entity may attempt to conform to the moral standard by simply embedding new practices and associating them with the respected entities operating in the already established morally governed context (Suchman, 1995).

The entity can avoid molding itself to the standards of a pre-existing context through a more proactive strategy of finding and selecting a new environment that is going to give the entity legitimacy as they are, without demanding exchanges. This strategy allows the entity to locate a context in which its activities that might be deemed undesirable in one context, now seem desirable, proper, or appropriate. Although the selection of moral criteria between contexts may be limited, an entity is able to select those criteria that best suit its predetermined goals and domain of activity. The standards the entity faces from its surroundings are often dependent on the importance and delicacy of its core activities. Thus, by altering one's goals, an entity may be able to further alter the source's expectations and the moral criteria that are applicable to the entity and its actions (Suchman, 1995).

Finally, moral legitimacy can be gained by manipulating the environment the entity is already operating. To do so, an entity must demonstrate its technical successes which consequently build the entity's legitimacy by showcasing the success to the sources. As a by-product, this display provides lasting validation by demonstrating events that helped them to gain legitimacy. These events include procedures, structures, and personnel which are admired by the sources and the surrounding environment. However, demonstrating performance and isolated socially constructed success may not suffice to change the general environment and sources perceptions. Instead, it may be more beneficial for the entity to proselytize by recruiting sources into their established belief system defined by outputs, procedures, structures, and personnel. Over time, this effort can help the entity to build a base of sources whose conceptions and cooperation build up the legitimacy of the source (Suchman, 1995).

3.2.3. Gaining cognitive legitimacy. Finally, an entity may choose to conform to widely accepted established models and standards in order to gain legitimacy through cognitive strategies. To conform to the surrounding environment, an entity may employ mimetic isomorphism by mimicking those entities and sources around them who already have succeeded in gaining legitimacy. The goal of such endeavors is to attain comprehensibility and become taken for granted among existing entities. Additionally, the entity may confirm prevailing practices and standards that are deemed to be sufficient to overcome the challenge of legitimation, however, this approach does not offer any promise of legitimacy. Most commonly this means formalizing the entity's operations to bring them under common controls and establishing hierarchical links to both units within the organizations as well as outside (Suchman, 1995).

Cognitive legitimacy can also be gained by selecting a favorable environment. In doing so, the entity selects an environment that reflects its goals, definitions, and accounts that may otherwise be limited to the entity itself. To find such environments, the entity must fill formal requirements set by sources that allow the entity to obtain certifications of legitimacy. The opportunities to seek certification are dependent on the sector and context the entity operates. Consequently, choosing an environment with strong institutional support provides the entity with more opportunities to attain certificates and thus attain legitimacy. Whereas selecting a fragmented environment with fewer possible certificates to attain, allows the entity to operate more freely and practice even unconventional tasks (Suchman, 1995).

Finally, the last strategy to gain cognitive legitimacy is rooted in standardizing models. Standardizing refers to promoting the entity's position within other institutions through taken-for-grantedness by encouraging isomorphism. The challenge in attempting to attain a prevalent position becomes competing for the same resources and sources with different distinguishable entities. Therefore, the standardization strategy calls for a position in which the entity becomes taken for granted through remaking others in their own image by becoming an admirable leader or by modeling themselves after other entities.

3.3 Theoretical Relevance

This thesis aims to research the possibility of gaining legitimacy for the HR department while going through a reorganization affected by an ongoing global pandemic. Therefore, the framework presented above was deemed suitable to further investigate how legitimacy is gained from the HR department's perspective. Furthermore, the framework allowed the authors to explore legitimacy from the perspective of the members within the HR department by utilizing the aforementioned concepts to obtain a comprehensive understanding of opinions and operations.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the thesis is presented and analyzed. The chosen research approach is a qualitative case study of an SME organization operating in the technology industry. The data collection has been divided into stages consisting of observing routine meetings and interviewing members individually to obtain an understanding of how the HR department functions and whether that department is perceived as legitimate among the department's own members. This chapter then lays out how the collected data is analyzed using the thematic approach while also highlighting ethical considerations and critique of the methodology overall.

4.1 Research Approach

The aim of the thesis was to investigate the perspectives and experiences within the HR department. Thus qualitative research methods were employed as they allowed exploring the topic more in-depth by creating value from the participants' experiences and understandings. A qualitative approach also allowed wider explorations of the respondent's opinions by giving them the opportunity to discuss topics and examples they find most relevant and interesting. On the contrary, quantitative research focuses on specific pre-set questions to generate straightforward answers which are then measured against one another, therefore, quantitative methods did not enable exploring the topic outside of the structured questions and topics. However, as opposed to qualitative research quantitative research would have allowed a more generalizable result (Bryman, 2012; Lewis, 2014).

4.2 Introduction to Case Organization

The research was conducted in the form of a case study to further generate a deeper understanding of the complex issue of legitimacy within a department (Bryman, 2012; Flyvbjerg, 2006). The data to conduct the case study was obtained from a Swedish SME, founded in the early 2000s, that operates within the technology industry within 10 markets with offices in several countries. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the organization had a modern take on its way of working as they were operating from various locations, therefore implementing remote work and online meetings. However, the prevailing circumstances pushed them to work remotely from their homes full time during an expansion and reorganization of the HR department. The department viewed this change as now managing over 200 offices remotely. Moreover, due to the organization operating in the technology industry, the prevailing crisis had enhanced its financial performance, entailing rapid growth for the organization. In early 2020 the HR department began a reorganization process to convert the department into a more modern depiction. Resulting in removing traditional HR titles and implementing new ones that removed the indication of people being a resource rather than a part of the organization. Prior, the department was renamed *People and Organization* to reflect a more modern image. Additionally, as a part of the reorganization, the department implemented an agile framework to structure their daily work, collaborations and meetings.

4.3 Sampling Strategy

The authors of the thesis reached out to the case organization in late 2020 and presented their idea of researching HR legitimacy and the potential effects that the global COVID-19 pandemic had. Contact was established with two gatekeepers (Bryman, 2012) at the organization that acted as contact persons throughout the collaboration during the thesis. During initial discussions, the gatekeepers provided information about the organization as well as granted access to meetings for observations, and provided contact information for the respondents to be interviewed.

The sampling strategy used in the research was purposive sampling which is based on selection by non-random means and selecting a case that reflects the research questions, and thus has the potential to answer them. More specifically, the chosen approach was narrowed down to a stratified purposive case, meaning that the sample consisted of a typical case within the subgroup of interest, which in this thesis was an HR department (Bryman, 2012; Walliman, 2011; Flyvbjerg, 2001). Furthermore, the case organization was selected after reaching out to multiple similar organizations and only receiving a response from the selected organization. The prevailing novel circumstances organizations are redirecting resources into change management (Caligiuri et. al., 2020; Folkhälsomyndighetens arbete, 2020; Kniffin, 2021), thus they may become more hesitant to take on new projects. Therefore, reducing the selection of accessible case organizations, which could be considered difficult regardless of the prevailing circumstances (Baškarada, 2014). Moreover, when using an approach based on non-randomness, it is important to note that generalizing the results to the society at large becomes infeasible (Bryman, 2012; Walliman, 2011).

As the authors aimed to investigate an organization that had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but was still able to continue operations without major layoffs, thus the field of IT was deemed interesting. This decision was supported by the harsh reality of many organizations having to close down due to the global COVID-19 pandemic (Alexander &

Karger, 2020; Evans et. al., 2020; Kvarnevik, 2020). Within the chosen organization, critical case sampling was used to narrow the sample down to the HR department as they represent a group that was able to provide answers to the research questions. Considering that the sample consists of a homogeneous group of people operating with the same field and the same organization, there was less variation, therefore, enabling the sample to be smaller (Bryman, 2012).

In total, 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out with all the members of the department. Both of the authors were present in all interviews to ensure as comprehensive familiarity and knowledge of the data as possible. These interviews were conducted with eight different respondents, where one interview included the two gatekeepers to create an understanding of the organization and the HR department. The remaining interviews were conducted with one respondent at a time. Although the authors planned to have one-on-one interviews with all eight respondents twice, due to unforeseen personal reasons, two interviews during the second round could not go forth. The selected number was deemed preferable due to the limited number of relevant respondents as well as the time restriction set on the completion of the thesis. Moreover, the first round was conducted to gain a better understanding of the respondents' tasks, responsibilities, and perceptions, whereas the aim of the second round was to deepen the authors' knowledge regarding HR's legitimacy during the reorganization affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.4 Data Collection Strategy

This section presents the data collection strategy in depth which includes primary data collection through observations and interviews. In order to be able to gather relevant data to answer the research question, a qualitative study was conducted. The data collection consisted of observing the department's own meetings and interviewing all members of the department to gain a more comprehensive image of the work they perform. During the data collection, the focus was to collect information regarding the informants' personal experiences and views to investigate the legitimacy of the HR department. All data collection was conducted online via the Zoom platform. Bryman (2012) notes that ensuring the comfortability of participants enhances the quality of the collected data. Therefore, the authors of the thesis chose to employ Zoom as it was already familiar to the respondents to both simplify communication as well as remove any friction that comes from implementing a new tool. Furthermore, Denscombe (2014) highlights that conducting interviews online may generate deeper information regarding sensitive topics as the respondents' discomfort decreases with the protection of a screen between the interviewers and interviewees. To both improve the quality of data as well as to create an atmosphere that resembles a face-to-face meeting the authors chose to include video throughout the interviews. Additionally, turning on the video cameras for the interviews reduced the possibility of losing meaningful physical expressions in the translations (Auer, 2021; Bryman, 2012). By conducting video interviews, the authors were able to collect valuable data, which was enhanced by the respondents already being used to communicating via video due to remote work. This helped to create a comfortable atmosphere where all respondents were able to express themselves as well as aided the authors to better understand the respondents due to the ability to see their body language. As per Bryman (2012) and Denscombe (2019), all interviews were conducted as semi-structured interviews as they were seen as beneficial considering the aim of the thesis. Semi-structured interviews collect participants' perspectives and generate a deeper discussion by allowing participants to have space for reflecting on their ideas and views which in turn may lead to further information. Any relevant emerging topics were further explored during an interview, however, prior to the interview, the researchers composed an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions to act as an outline for the discussion (Bryman, 2012; Denscombe, 2010).

4.4.1 Observations. During participant observations, the authors immersed themselves into two of the HR department's pre-planned meetings to observe behavior and conversations between the participants (Bryman, 2012; Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). These meetings followed the agile framework and the aim was for the team members to present and discuss the work that had been conducted during the previous two weeks. Furthermore, these meetings were deemed advantageous for the thesis as they included all members of the department in question. Access to these meetings was gained through established collaboration with the department beforehand. The meeting was conducted remotely online through Google Meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the meetings the authors acted as what Bryman (2012) calls non-participating observers, meaning that data was collected through passive participation. Data collection during the observations consisted of full-field notes that entailed detailed notes that were written during the observation and varied between full quotes as well as descriptions of emotions and topics that arose. The notes were further discussed between the authors immediately after the meeting where initial ideas and interpretations of the notes were written down (Bryman, 2012).

Two meetings were observed at the start of the data collection as they were considered to pave the way for the structure of the upcoming interviews (Bryman, 2012) and acted as sources of rich data on both the HR department's tasks as well as teamwork. The number of observations was limited to two, as the meetings had been previously planned by the department and scheduled to be held every two weeks. In order to consider the observations as groundwork for interviews, the time frame allowed for only two meetings to be included.

4.4.2 Pilot-study. A pilot study was conducted early in the process to test the instruments and the interview guide created from information retrieved from the observations as well as previous research. Bryman (2012) advocated for a pilot study to ensure the instruments used in the research are adequate and provide relevant data. The pilot study consisted of three interviews with managers in the department in order to further understand the current state of the department. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the managers and authors to also dive into topics outside of the interview guide that appears to be of value. Moreover, the pilot study was conducted to ensure the adequacy of the developed interview guide and to provide information to further adjust it for the following primary data collection. The information gathered from all three pilot interviews was deemed extremely valuable not only for the construction of the interview guides but also for the overall results of the thesis. Therefore, these three pilot interviews were analyzed and included in the following chapter titled *Interviews* as well as in the final results of the thesis.

4.4.3 Interviews. The guide constructed for the semi-structured interviews consisted of sets of questions relating to the research aim, however, some questions could be discarded depending on the participant's answers and knowledge. Additionally, the sets of questions could have varied depending on the position and knowledge of the participant. Furthermore, as the research progressed new emerging information from the interviews became grounds for modifying the interview guide for upcoming interviews (Bryman, 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013). The interviews were recorded due to documentation and enabling transcriptions of the information that was produced. Considering the interviews were held remotely via Zoom the application provided the ability to record the meeting as it went on, which decreased the risk of having to present possibly off-putting recording devices to interviewees. This was done on both ends of the authors to ensure that data was not lost or compromised due to technical issues (Bryman, 2012).

Although interviews with open-ended questions had the possibility to provide rich data, they also imposed some limitations. These questions required great effort from both the interviewer and the respondent. Respondents often tended to talk longer on topics they found interesting thus swaying away from the topics at hand, which led to providing irrelevant data. This became a hindrance for the authors as it prolonged the already time-consuming transcription process. Furthermore, the interviews themselves were considered to be time-consuming as each respondent was provided with a similar timeframe, and the interview guides were at times modified before the interviews to better reflect the respondents' position and knowledge (Bryman, 2012).

4.5 Analytical Strategy

The collected data was then analyzed by using thematic analysis. To be able to code the data, the recordings from the interviews were first transcribed verbatim to ease managing the data and avoid having to relisten the recordings. Transcribing word by word and adding mentions of hesitations and emotional expressions circumvented misunderstandings when interpreting the recordings (Bryman, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, the observed meetings were not recorded but the authors took detailed notes and composed memos to be further analyzed during the coding phase alongside the interview transcripts using the Nvivo software.

Thematic coding enabled the authors to draw connections between different respondents' answers as well as the questions that arose during the interviews. Similarities and differences in the first interviews were further analyzed and contributed to both the structure of the new interview guides for the second interviews, as well as the final results of the thesis. Through coding, the authors identified similarities, differences, missing important data, and distinctive themes in the transcriptions to easier tie them to the theoretical starting points of the thesis. Further, repetition, metaphors and analogies, transitions, linguistic connections as well as indigenous typologies and categories were identified and analyzed in the collected data (Bryman, 2012). Some examples of the most frequent codes were *Growing team increases visibility, Agile promotes cross-department collaboration,* and *Important for PAO to be there for employees.* The codes that arose from the data, were contrasted and combined into subthemes and finally themes which reflected the answers provided by the respondents in the light of previous studies and the chosen framework. The themes and subthemes of the thematic coding stem from recurring motifs in the collected data, relevant previous research, and the theoretical framework, and emerge from analyzing transcripts and field notes (Bryman, 2012). The main themes included: *Agile, Becoming Modern, Responsibilities of Working in PAO, Collaborating with Managers, Creating Legitimacy, Operating Across Context, Cross-Department Collaboration, Employee Experience, Feedback from Organization, Good Leader, Honeymoon Phase, HR Trends, Leadership*

Team, OKRs, PAO Being a Support Function, Remote Work, Defining the Reorganization, Traditional HR, and *PAOs Visibility.*

4.6 Limitations

When conducting research it is important to reflect on what limitations could be present. The human element of conducting research entailed potentially being biased when structuring research questions, interview guides, and analyzing the results, among other things. However, this could be avoided by attempting to make an effort to remain as objective as possible throughout the research. In line with this, a possible language barrier between participants and the authors possibly affected how data were transcribed and analyzed. This may have led to possible misunderstandings or the authors' biases affecting the interpretation of the data (Gibbs, 2007).

The chosen analytical strategy thematic analysis posed some limitations regarding the generalizability of the results as they can not be applied to departments and individuals outside of the sample. Further, the analytical strategy offers no clear structure on how to analyze data as it allows the researchers to mold it to their specific study and needs (Bryman, 2012). However, the most prominent limitation this thesis faced was due to the perspective from which the authors decided to conduct the research. As the main focus was to investigate the perceptions and legitimacy of an HR department, the theory was angled to reflect HR's operations. However, this can be seen as a limitation due to most legitimacy studies discussing either legitimacy within the department or in relation to stakeholders outside the organization, or both in connection to one another. However, in this thesis only legitimacy was only explored from the HR department's own perspective due to Drori and Honig's (2013) finding demonstrating legitimacy outside the department at times undermined legitimacy inside the department as the actors outside highlighted their own needs and desires rather than granted legitimacy to other actors. Additionally, this limitation became evident during the data collection as only the HR department was included in the sample. This both diminished the sample size as well as the perception the authors were able to collect in regard to HR's collaborations and tasks. Furthermore, the authors went through an iterative process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009) during which the focus of this thesis was narrowed down to one aspect of Suchman's (1995) organizational legitimacy framework. The obtained results best reflected gaining strategies due to the current state of the case organization as well as time limitations, whereas maintaining and repairing strategies were not as prominent, therefore these strategies only appear in the background as supporting concepts. The process of limiting the use of the framework became a limitation concerning the possibilities for the various aspects of organizational legitimacy that could be researched with the help of the framework.

4.7 Trustworthiness

To evaluate social qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the study must be viewed. In order for the research to obtain trustworthiness, it must be credible, transferable, dependable, confirmable, and fulfill the demands of consistent measurements of the chosen concepts (Bryman, 2012).

Credibility was obtained through the integrity of the conclusions that were generated from the results of the research. It considered the measurement of the results as well as the causality between them which also included the transferability of the research and whether the results were applicable to other social contexts (Bryman, 2012). As shown in the previous research, the legitimacy of the HR profession had been researched in various studies throughout the years. This thesis added to the variety of studies with a fresh perspective and setting, thus duplicating the study in another setting could have further provided new information to the already established field. However, as the thesis used thematic analysis, the transferability of results became hindered due to specific case-related results (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, the dependability of results is evaluated if the research could be duplicated at another time. To ensure dependability, it has been suggested that complete field notes and steps of research are to be documented and submitted for peer review (Bryman, 2012). However, as Bryman (2012) noted this had still been a rare practice due to the large data sets generated by qualitative research. For these reasons, the authors had not chosen to validate the thesis based on dependability but instead highlight reliability. Reliability among the respondents was ensured by having both authors present at all data collection to reduce the risk of misinterpretation (Bryman, 2012). However, external reliability, which assesses the possibility to replicate the study at another time (Bryman, 2012), is limited due to the unique circumstances in which the thesis is conducted as the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, the boom of remote work, and developing HR field, had created a context unique to this time. Furthermore, the already well-established framework by Suchman (1995) and topics relating to legitimacy can be applicable in other contexts undergoing a process of change, enabling the use of the framework of this study in another place in time. Finally, the confirmability of the thesis is measured against the objectivity of the authors and the results of the thesis (Bryman, 2012). Bryman (2012) notes that complete objectivity is impossible in social research, instead, it is valuable to convey that the authors have conducted the thesis in good faith, meaning they have not allowed their own values or theoretical inclinations to affect the results. When conducting the thesis, the authors have attempted to disregard personal biases by staying close to the collected data when analyzing and writing the results.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

When conducting a thesis, it is important to consider the ethical aspects of the research. In doing so, a risk assessment to determine potential legal liabilities as well as potential stress factors that could affect the department's work was viewed. When conducting the thesis The Swedish Research Council's (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) four ethical requirements were taken into account to not violate the participants' integrity. The four requirements consist of, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement, the information requirement, and the utilization requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). These requirements were consistently applied by the authors throughout the thesis. As per the consent requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), the participants gave their consent to partake in the research and they were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment. In addition, the participants were allowed to and were made aware that they are able to exclude any information they have shared, within a two-week period after their interview. Furthermore, the confidentiality requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) states that it is important to emphasize that all information and personal data is anonymous, thus the authors handled the data with care and stored it securely. In addition, following the information requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), the authors informed the participants of their role in the research and that their participation was voluntary. However, the contact information for the interviews was obtained from an HR manager at the case organization, therefore, participants did not remain entirely anonymous within the department. This information was disclosed to the participants prior to the interview for full transparency. Furthermore, in this thesis, the authors decided not to include or indicate the different respondents to ensure anonymity for them within the organization and department. This became increasingly important due to the small number of respondents and their familiarity with each other, which could have meant that respondents were able to recognize each other's answers. Finally, according to the utilization requirement (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), the participants were informed about how the gathered data was used and the aim of the thesis was disclosed to inform the participants about how data was used for the purposes of empirical research.

5. Empirical Findings

The People and Organization (PAO) department in the organization is responsible for people-related issues such as working conditions, the welfare of employees, the workplace itself as well as the organizational culture. The department acts in place of a traditional human resources department as the previous Head of PAO deemed it to be more suitable in such a modern organization. Since early 2020 the department has been going through a reorganization to develop the structure, tasks, and image of the department to better reflect their position and responsibilities in the organization. Furthermore, this reorganization has been largely affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the reorganization was sped up as the organization was forced by the government's regulations to shift to remote work.

This chapter focuses on presenting the findings gathered throughout the data collection. The Gaining strategies were deemed as the most valuable for the aim of this thesis as they explored ways for the PAO department to gain legitimacy while undergoing a reorganization during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus it has also been explored more extensively. The actions and processes taken by PAO to gain legitimacy are presented through Suchman's (1995) framework of legitimization strategies. In the chapters below the authors lay out the findings regarding the PAO department's opportunities to gain legitimacy as well as mention some actions that contributed to maintaining and repairing their legitimacy.

5.1 Define Goals: Dissociating from Traditional HR

To clarify how the PAO department works, the department was renamed to People and Organization (PAO) prior to the reorganization instead of traditionally calling themselves Human Resources (HR). The purpose of this shift was to highlight that people are at the center of operation rather than implying people are resources: "It sounds like we are not treating people in a respectful way [...] when we use the word people instead of human resources, that brings a lot of different value actually because we are people-oriented". Furthermore, it was evident that this perception of the name PAO better-reflected opinions of their work and the organization. Statements claiming that it "sounds like we're working with robots", "resources sounds like a machine" and "it [HR] makes it sound like we are not working with people but only looking at the numbers and statistics" was a common mindset within the team. Moreover, the mindset reflects how the organization operates overall "I don't really think resources make any sense to talk about in [company]. We do people in our organization". Additionally, while renaming the department had helped to gain legitimacy it also repaired possible legitimacy losses through mirroring the prevailing HR trends of moving away from the associations of people as resources "I think it [PAO] explains more" whereas "human resources sounds more… old and sounds more like something you used in an… industry before".

5.2 Seek Certification: Change in Titles and Tasks

During the reorganization, the titles of the PAO department were renewed to better reflect their tasks and responsibilities. "They kept some tasks but they also added new responsibilities within their roles and tried to clear out who did what". In the process of clarifying the roles "were widened and responsibilities added or clarified. Because I feel like you already did many things, it was just not a part of your title or job description". However, both the roles and tasks still seem to be unclear within the organization. There have been instances where managers have not been clear on who they should contact regarding a specific issue. Furthermore, due to the ambiguity of PAO member's roles, the division of tasks is unclear even between the members of the PAO team. "I don't know who does what. I know titles [...] But THAT doesn't really tell me what we are in PAO". However, by redefining the roles the team had attempted to repair the ambiguity to clarify their roles within the organization to modernize themselves and remain relevant.

5.3 Produce Proper Outcomes: Purpose Statement and Hybrid Workspace

To define the goals of the PAO department a purpose statement was formulated. The goal was to clarify why the department exists both for the team themselves but also to "empower the manager to create a good employee experience". The statement was constructed by a team within PAO, however, the progress was presented to the department during the demo meetings to get feedback and include all members' input in the statement itself. After some modification based on feedback, the statement was formulated as follows: "To encourage a workplace that is far from ordinary, where people thrive and accomplish remarkable things together". Furthermore, the statement emphasized PAO acting as a neutral party in the organization to create a safe environment for employees. The motivation for this is to enable employees to develop within the organization and express their opinions without fearing judgment or offending their managers. "If I go to someone and say like, are you OK? Are you sure you should be here? They don't feel like they're being attacked or they're being judged. It's just like, I care. And it's OK to say I'm not OK".

Helping the managers and the organization to succeed was a motivation behind the PAO department creating processes for the organization. “I think we need them [processes] as well to do as a team be able to support our organization”. In order to do so, a team member expressed that they had been “having a meet and greet with every manager that I’m supporting to really show them that I will be here for them and if they have any problem just reach out”. PAO created these processes and routines that are continuously performed by PAO within the organization, due to wanting “to have processes that HELP the managers to succeed”.

Under the current circumstances controlled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization is currently working remotely. The workforce has expressed a desire to continue remote work even after the pandemic and the possibility to move back to the offices. “Some employees are more productive and work better when staying at home because, for example, they spend a lot of time commuting”. Therefore, discussions regarding a hybrid workplace have emerged: “We have heard a lot of people feel like, why can't we work from home?”. In the light of this discussion, the need for a remote work policy to secure employees’ welfare and the right to structure their work as they see fit has become a vital request to meet as an employer. “We need to think of hybrid workspaces. Because that's the only way we can stay true to our vision and mission [...] because it is going to be asked of us “.

5.4 Standardize New Models: Changing Processes and the Agile Framework

The process of reorganization was initiated by identifying “traffic lights” and points of improvement so-called “red lights” that needed to be attended to first in order to standardize the model of operations for PAO. The reorganization was described as building and renovating a house.

> When I came, this house was not in really good shape and, and to fix that, I had a painter who was fantastic at painting the house and so on. [...] the house is a metaphor for all our core processes and, you know, our whole delivery. So, when, when everything is in order, it's fantastic and shiny. But the house wasn't that when I came.

Throughout the process of the reorganization the head of PAO implemented these traffic lights to not only gain but maintain legitimacy through the *Fit For Future* plan to gather “what is needed, what does our organization have NOW and what needs to we see for the future of the people function and really trying to navigate our way there and that’s why we started to talk a lot more about the employee experience”. Additionally, the *Fit For Future* plan was expanded due to the ongoing pandemic as it presented an opportunity and revealed a desire for hybrid workplaces in the future as well as helped to develop a competitive advantage on the market.

> I'm actually thankful for the COVID situation. I think it has forced us into this change more naturally. Because when everything is upside down, the world is upside down. You can get more open to changes, if you try to change something that is really set, then it's harder. But now I think everybody had to rethink the way you work, rethink how to organize and it turned out to be a good opportunity. And it's also the fact that we are distributed in different countries and cities. So when everybody works from home, we are similar and equal. We are as near and as far as everybody is to each other.

Furthermore, the recruitment process and adjustment of the work environment to be compliant with the law were some of the first red lights identified, however, the need for help to carry out the reorganization was the most prominent issue according to the Head of PAO.

> And then we realized, OK, we have to ask for help. We cannot do it alone [...] then when they came, we started to discuss how we can best be organized, the fit for future plan. How can we be more efficient? How can we help each other better? How can we collaborate better? And then the agile framework came to us.

Simultaneously, the PAO team grew and expanded which resulted in creating new processes and increasing supporting managers as well as helping employees to succeed. “I don't think we would have been this successful without the work we actually are doing to help our employees be able to do the best work that they can to have the right tools”. When building the house, implementing the agile framework into the people function became a part of the reorganization. The implementation of the agile framework entailed becoming more integrated within the organization as the majority were already utilizing the framework. Additionally, becoming agile strengthened the team by increasing collaboration, structuring the work, and providing psychological safety.

> I always had to make sure that we have a good atmosphere, climate, and culture. Where we can be honest, open where we can feel like we can all be ourselves and when you have that, and help people create that psychological safety and good communication, openness, and transparency.

Although the positive impacts were often highlighted, the PAO team still feels unsure of how work should be conducted under the agile framework. Furthermore, learning this new way of working has taken a lot of time and energy both individually as well as in the form of increased meetings. Critique towards the framework has included feelings of reporting one's work during various meetings which changed temporarily but eventually they fell into old patterns. Furthermore, all team members have not been in agreement with their opinions towards the agile framework. "I have always been struggling with this one because a lot of other people in my team have been 'oh I love agile' and I've been the only one who's been like oh I don't understand". However, becoming agile helped the PAO team to maintain collaboration with other departments with the organization. In order to strengthen the relationship between PAO and the managers they support, an agile working method with retrospectives and syncs reoccurs every six months to ensure that the collaboration between the two parties is going well. By doing this the parties inform each other of "their expectations so they can have this trust in each other".

Moreover, other standardized new models included expanding the recruitment process to increasingly involve managers as well as develop and maintain the organizational culture. The culture has been a part of the PAO department's responsibility and is vital for the organization's sense of unity. They are therefore expected to and responsible for creating workshops, involving employees, and delivering the message of the body and mind of the organization, to the organization.

5.5 Mimic Standards: HR Trends and the Agile Framework

The reorganization of PAO indicated that the team had been affected by social movements of becoming a more modern depiction of HR which had been highlighted by multiple PAO members as something the team actively strived for. "I would say on the group level, there is a big HR transformation journey going on". Furthermore, in an environment affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to both regulations and emerging trends, the organization implemented remote work as a permanent working method as a part of hybrid workspaces. These trends of modernizing the department could be seen in large competitors. **"**And if we want to be with the top tech firms, we're going to have to be that modern and the like up to date" as it is a "crucial journey to make if you would like to be interesting for candidates".

By implementing and tailoring the agile working methods to PAO the department had become more in line with the rest of the organization as well as participated in a common language regarding the way the organization had been operating. "I think it has been a key to getting to see or to get relevant because we speak the same language now". However, some team members hesitated on whether they had experienced a common agile language throughout the organization although "common things around the agile way of working exist, I wouldn't say that. I don't know if we have the same language". "Working in the same manner but slightly different they're both agile, they can meet and use the same vocabulary and terminology. Now they really understand each other".

5.6 Formalize Operations: Unity and Collaboration

The PAO department created and sent out processes that created unity within the organization, however, this practice also consolidated operations throughout the entire organization.

> We were sitting with the recruitment process and everyone had been doing it a little bit differently [...] but now we did a template on how we work with a process like recruitment and everyone knows that these are the steps and the managers know what they're expected to do, and how you send in the information that we need to create job ads and stuff. We at PAO know when we should be included in the process and what we do around that.

Although the recruitment process seemed to have been successfully implemented throughout the organization, some processes had not yet been developed to the same standard. Further, when PAO was sending out complete processes to the managers, instances, where the management did not follow the processes, had occurred due to the lack of PAO following up with the managers. Moreover, the PAO department started involving managers more in the creation of job advertisements to maintain collaboration. An experiment was launched to police the tone and image the advertisements reflect when they are written by managers instead of a member of the PAO department. The experiments strengthened collaboration and the "need to work together with them [managers] and create exactly what they need and what our new recruitments need and just co-creating [...] we should continue to take the lead, we should invite the organization even more". PAO received positive feedback from managers saying that they "enjoyed writing their own ad and that it would be impossible without a guide" and PAO's contribution.

5.7 Building Reputation: Visibility, Culture, and Empowering Managers

In order to build a reputation, the PAO department has employed multiple strategies to become more visible. These strategies include working closely with managers to create and obtain processes, supporting the organization with daily activities, and communicating their purpose both within and outside the department. To promote togetherness at the organization, there is an annual conference including informative and valuable information planned by the top management team of the organization. Further, the PAO Manager was responsible for highlighting and spreading the company's culture and soul to further clarify them. Additionally, the PAO team organized an advent calendar for the organization to create a fun interactive event to promote team spirit while the organization was working remotely online. The calendar consisted of daily activities, performances, and games to increase teamwork when working remotely as well as boosted overall morale. Consequently, the respondents experienced that these events created visibility for PAO and affected the perceptions of PAO's work, creating a more interactive atmosphere where PAO is not just hiding in the corner. "Everybody can see PAO is more visible this year. Not, you know, the one in the corner, the one that nobody knows what they do". Moreover, the respondents believed that becoming more visible promoted the organization's knowledge of the department and their tasks which in turn increased their reputation in the organization by allowing them to have realistic expectations of PAO and their contribution. Therefore, a member of the team expressed "we're even more visible now, it's more obvious what we do". However, other respondents indicated that some members of PAO, as well as other managers, do not fully understand the responsibilities and tasks PAO entails as "the organization doesn't always know what they can expect from us so they don't ask for it.".

The PAO department aimed to empower managers to cooperate rather than perform tasks for them that might have traditionally been specific to HR. The development of the recruitment process is an example of the department attempting to create alongside the hiring managers to unify as well as decrease the organization's dependability on PAO, in doing so, the respondents noted that collaboration had increased their visibility in the organization. The newfound "modern mindset will probably have you say let's co-create rather than say I'll fix it for you". However, with the reorganization the department is "giving more understanding, working more together, giving ownership to other people to moving forward in the right way" in order to bring value to the department. Alas, in the attempt to empower the managers the PAO department has in some cases meandered into problems with the division of tasks.

> We're always on about empowering the managers. And I only see that that means throw another process at the manager right now. And I want that to change. It shouldn't be that that's how you empower them, by giving them a process to follow and more work to do. It should be that we lighten the load instead somehow.

Furthermore, there has been evidence of a lack of follow-up on processes after the PAO department has sent the process out to managers.

> I think I'm like, OK, so we've done this process, we've spent all this time and we sent it out there, and then what? That's it? We've done nothing else with it? So I think I then wonder what else we're doing that with.

Scilicet, how managers proceed with the processes they receive from the PAO department has been questioned. “What the manager will do with that and how much they will take from us and, how they will do with it, we don't have the control of that”. This has resulted in the members of the PAO department expressing fear of managers doubting the integrity of the processes due to an overwhelming amount that is being thrown at them without follow-up. To combat this, the importance of collaboration has been highlighted. “Of course people have to be open but by being visible and creating relationships and really showing that we are here to support the organization and be better as an employer I think it [legitimacy] will come and last!”. Furthermore, to maintain legitimacy through collaboration out in the organization the head of PAO participates in the top leadership team meetings. This collaboration mainly entails making “sure that our projects succeed or our initiatives are launched in the best way”. Throughout the collaboration, it has become evident to the members of PAO that the leadership team trusts them and allows them to work freely to reach their targets. “I really feel that we’re appreciated as a department from the leadership team”. However, during the leadership meetings, the members of PAO experienced that they have to work harder to have their voices heard. Therefore, the PAO department has at times found it challenging to discuss people-related issues when the leadership team often focuses on technical issues. Although, when decisions on people-issues have to be made, PAO has experienced that they do have the leadership team’s attention and trust.

5.8 Responding to the Organization’s Needs: Culture and the Agile Framework

The PAO department responded to the organization’s needs by hosting a culture workshop where they presented the organizations with an opportunity to take part in formulating new definitions for the existing organizational core values and culture. During the workshop participants engaged in activities to redefine the values to better reflect the organization and its members. The activities included brainstorming, word associations, and discussion between participants. Based on the generated results, the PAO department formulated new definitions for the core values to demonstrate to the organization that their opinions matter in PAO’s processes. The feedback PAO received after the workshop was perceived as overwhelmingly positive which showed them that the participants enjoyed the experience. In turn, this made the PAO department feel as though their work became more visible in the organization.

In becoming agile, the PAO department has adopted agile working methods, language, and personality, thus making the character more comparable to the organization. Due to the agile working methods being widely used in the technology industry the organization has utilized Objective Key Results (OKR) to set common short-term goals within the organization. Thus, by incorporating these working methods into the PAO department OKRs have been introduced to set quarterly goals within the team as well as making the team more cohesive in the organization. The PAO members experienced that the OKRs “create a sense of belonging because you have the overall agenda of the entire organization and then all teams could contribute to that in their way with their expertise”.

5.9 Embed Values in Institutions: Culture Workshop and Values

The aforementioned culture workshop served as a strategy to spread the culture and values throughout the organization. Additionally, the PAO department has composed a Culture Book that is public to the entire organization including definitions and examples of the organizational culture and its implications on everyday work. The purpose of the book is to spread “the tonality of [company] as an employer”. Many of the values in the book reflect the culture and values of the wider context in which the organization was founded and partially still operates. These values include promoting the well-being and individuality of all organizational members. By working continuously with the organizational culture and core values, the PAO department was maintaining a common culture throughout the organization. “Culture is a topic that need be all the time put in the light”. However, as the process is ongoing and as PAO receives feedback on the values they modify the descriptions to reflect the organization’s views and opinions. Moreover, creating a culture book and working with the organizational culture are social movements that the PAO department actively works on in order to remain relevant as both a team and an organization.

5.10 Demonstrate Success: the Head of PAO and the Honeymoon Phase

“My manager is probably one of the best managers I’ve EVER worked with”. The members of PAO agreed that the individual effort of the Head of PAO to constantly praise, affirm and reassure the team members brought transparency within the team that boosts their ability to exceed in their work during the reorganization.

> The Head of PAO always sees us which is really nice and put value into our work and are very good at explaining what kind of difference we are doing and how much this means for the team or the organization or for her for example and I think with her being so transparent and honest about that helps the team.

Moreover, the psychological safety created by the Head of PAO when the team members feel weak and insecure increases their confidence in their work. “Even when I do the things when I think I’m not good enough like I tried something or I’m nervous or not sure about this”. Thus, providing the team a platform where they were able to present ideas and work through trial and error. “But she reaffirms me even when I’m weak so to speak when I feel not at my best”.

Additionally, repairing strategies were identified in the findings when the team members addressed a lack of constructive feedback by not wanting to be the first one to critique and burst the bubble. “No, I don't want to be the first one that does it [gives critique] or I don't want to be the one that makes someone cry”. Moreover, they believe that critique could be better received from an authoritative figure within the team. The team called this stage a *honeymoon phase* which refers to them being polite and cordial rather than bringing up critique or development ideas to preserve the friendly atmosphere. To repair the situation, the team expressed a desire to move on to the next phase to be able to give constructive feedback and become more productive. However, all members of the team have not noted any issues regarding polite or restricted communication due to the *honeymoon phase.*

> I’m not a very critical person sometimes it takes to see, okay maybe it’s only me who thinks there is not anything to improve or don’t take it well but I feel like our team members are stronger with this and of course, everyone from the PAO department can critique.

Moreover, the team experienced that getting to know each other and collaboration managers was hindered due to working remotely and not being able to meet each other face to face.

5.11 Proselytize: Unifying Cross-Context

The values and culture of the original context have been reflected and implemented in other contexts in which the organization operates. This process was boosted by the reorganization as the PAO department has attempted to work more across contexts with their department to create unity and ensure that all organizational members have the same rights and opportunities. “Because I think it is wrong [...] it shouldn't be worse just because they're in another context. We should be leading the way [...] [company] will actually look after you". The PAO team expressed worry regarding the differences between contexts and pleaded for more unity, equality, and fair working conditions cross-contexts. Furthermore, to maintain unity within the organization, the members of the PAO department claimed that "it's a big priority to make sure we are all like one company" to ensure cooperation between teams, departments, and contexts. Creating this interconnection between PAO and managers is beneficial for all members of the organization as they are able to help each other to reach goals. "Employees are not used to take that kind of responsibility for themselves, they're waiting for someone to tell them what to do, and the manager waiting for us to tell what to do". In order to foster those relationships, "I think we need more processes to help the managers work in one similar way"

5.12 Conclusion

Conclusively, the People and Organization department had a desire to distance themselves from the depiction of traditional Human Resources meaning they had a desire to become a more involved strategic partner. This was done through the reorganization and the *Fit For Future* plan which included becoming agile as well as increasing collaboration to become more visible. Additionally, unifying the organization was of importance and was obtained through creating new processes and distributing them across contexts. However, as a new team, PAO experienced productivity and communication issues due to wanting to maintain a friendly atmosphere and feared the consequences of critical feedback. Moreover, getting to know each other became more difficult due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and remote work. Although the pandemic created some difficulties with collaboration, the team overall experienced that it helped them through the reorganization by speeding up the process.

6. Analysis

The analysis of empirical results is presented to demonstrate and contrast the results using the theoretical concepts from Suchman's (1995) organizational legitimacy research. The first challenge the PAO department faced when attempting to gain legitimacy was to institutionalize and embed their activities in the organization to become an established and vital part of the organization. Additionally, when incorporating new activities they must consider how well the new activities suit the department and its reputation or potentially decouple already existing assumptions. The second challenge was to either create new sources such as more collaborations with managers or the leadership team or convince already legitimate sources to lend their support and legitimacy to the PAO department. To overcome these challenges, the PAO department employed conforming to the existing environment within the organization and manipulating the existing environment (Suchman, 1995). The initiatives presented below to respond to these challenges primarily utilized gaining strategies, however, some maintaining and repairing strategies were mentioned in relation to clarify PAO's roles, responsibilities, and perceptions (Suchman, 1995).

6.1. First Challenge of Gaining Legitimacy

To combat the first challenge presented by Suchman (1995) the PAO department had undergone a reorganization to expand the team and further clarify their contribution both within their team and the organization. To standardize a new model of operations by first identifying points of improvement and then attending to them, the PAO team manipulated the environment within the team. By doing so the PAO department may have reinstalled a sense of hope and confidence in their ability to become a vital and legitimate part of the organization as well as their tasks. In order to maintain the gained legitimacy of the changes after the reorganization process begun, the department followed a process called *Fit for Future,* which entailed taking the organization's feedback into account as well as staying updated with the changes happening in the surrounding environment regarding the COVID-19 pandemic to further be able to cater to the organization's need. Part of this process is to implement a hybrid work policy as it had been expressed as a desire by the organization as well as their external environment. By doing this, PAO assisted the organization to prevail in a competitive market as well as prepared the organization to be flexible with possible upcoming changes. This policy had been widely liked by the organization, which has made PAO proud of their work, furthermore, having such a flexible and future-oriented policy, gave PAO a sense of being a pioneer in their field, thus increasing their own perception of their legitimate status.

Additionally, to gain legitimacy the PAO department standardized a new way of working by creating and sending out processes for the managers throughout the organization. However, not all processes had yet been developed to the same standard as e.g. the recruitment process, therefore this initiative had not yet been finished. Furthermore, some processes that were sent out to the managers had not been followed which created concerns within the PAO department that it could delegitimize both the organization and the department due to lack of unity. Issues that may arise are team members viewing their own work as unvalued and pointless which in turn may lead them to delegitimize themselves as a department. Further, the implementation of the agile framework manipulated the team’s working environment by creating psychological safety thus simplifying teamwork that may have improved their legitimacy status from their own point of view. However, the structure of the agile framework created a feeling of reporting which may have decreased legitimacy as it affected the team member’s perception of the framework. Additionally, as some members of PAO experienced that they did not know how to work with the framework, the uncertainty may have decreased their legitimacy as a team.

During an annual conference in early 2021, the Head of PAO presented the organizational culture and its implications on daily work thus manipulating how the organization perceives and works with culture. This clarified the culture as well as PAO’s contribution to spread and maintain it. This gave PAO a platform and time to advertise their work as well as unified the organization and demonstrated a sense of belonging within the company. Further, within the PAO department, the team worked together to reach their goal in regard to culture and how to maintain it in a cohesive manner throughout the organization. This effort enabled the Head of PAO to present and discuss these issues with the organization, which in turn brought value to PAO as they gained legitimacy through increased visibility and clarity. The team also advertised their work by encouraging managers to co-create with them rather than PAO just handing the answer to managers. By doing so, PAO’s image evolved from being a mere support function to being a department that is actively contributing in collaboration thus increasing their legitimacy within the organization. Additionally, to maintain their image the PAO team collaborates frequently with the top leadership team to further discuss and highlight the people-perspective. The PAO department had been allowed to work freely to reach their targets which boosted PAO’s confidence and possibly legitimacy within the department as well as out in the organization. However, at the top leadership meeting, the members often focused on advancing their own departments and legitimizing their own achievements and goals, meaning PAO had to fight to get the attention and a platform to bring up the people-issues. However, this may have created a sense that their work had not been as important as the work of other departments, which may have made the members of the PAO department question their own legitimacy and importance in the organization, although they have received the freedom to conduct their work as they see fit.

Furthermore, renaming the department from *HR* to *PAO* dissociated them from the traditional and purely operational depiction of HR into better reflecting the people-focus thus repairing possible lost legitimacy. The PAO department formulated a purpose statement that defined their goals to further gain legitimacy. In order to reach those goals, they had to select which organizational members would be able to help them through collaboration. Thus, managers' input in processes was required for PAO to fulfill its purpose and to gain legitimacy within the team. By setting goals, the PAO team was able to reflect their moral values thus demonstrating to the organization and collaborating managers what was expected of them. Additionally, the team sought certification by renewing their tiles and role descriptions to better fit the organization’s requirements of being a modern technology organization. In doing so, they selected to adhere to the modern standards that the agile technology organization had as well as reflected the ongoing HR transformation. This might have increased the department’s legitimacy both within the organization but also within the team as it created a sense of belonging in the organization as well as within the HR sector. Furthermore, the process of renewing titles clarified the PAO departments’ responsibilities to the organization as well as themselves.

Further, to overcome the first challenge the PAO department conformed to the pre-existing needs and desires of the organizational members to work more with the culture of the company. By inviting and including the rest of the organization in a culture workshop where the organizational core values were discussed to create new more fitting definitions the PAO department demonstrated interest in the organization’s well-being. Further, the results of the workshop were considered by the department when redefining and developing the core values. Later to demonstrate congruence the results were shared with the organization to further include them in the process. Additionally, the PAO department conformed to the organization’s need by implementing an agile framework that already was widely used elsewhere in the organization, thus demonstrating a commitment to the organization. The framework shaped the PAO team’s working methods to reflect the rest of the organization more, thus helping them to maintain legitimacy through creating more unity between them and the organization.

As the team was simultaneously growing, their extended ability to respond to the organization’s needs improved thus possibly improving the organization’s perceptions of PAO. Furthermore, by implementing the common agile working methods, the PAO department conformed to existing practices and mimicked agile standards in a cognitive way creating unity. Thus reinforcing the legitimacy of PAO as a relevant organizational member both in the eyes of the surrounding organization as well as the PAO team itself. However, due to debate among members of PAO on how much common ground the agile framework created during the reorganization, PAO’s own perception of their relevancy and legitimacy had decreased. Furthermore, the PAO department mimicked external standards by attempting to modernize their operations to mirror large competitors’ developments. This attempt could have increased the department’s legitimacy as they had developed with the trends of the HR sector. The PAO team also attempted to generate unity through formalizing operations by creating and sending out common processes to control operations that fall under the realm of responsibility of the PAO department. In doing so, they established ownership for those processes which may have increased their legitimate status within the organization as well as increased their own sense of purpose. To protect and maintain the established legitimacy, the department has been protecting its accomplishment of creating a unified tone throughout the published job advertisements when collaborating with managers rather than giving the managers free hands. By doing this the PAO department maintained their relationship with the managers and continued co-creating with them. Thus giving PAO an insight into the managers and organization’s needs to further maintain their relationship and legitimacy.

A team within the PAO department formulated a purpose statement to reflect their responsibilities as well as position within the organization. They included empowering managers which implied satisfying their needs and producing proper morally sanctioned outcomes. Thus by creating the statement conforming to the environment the department established their own view of themselves as well as their position in the organization. This may lead to increased legitimacy within the department through a better self-image as well as externally in the organization through the team mirroring their perception and importance to the organization. Furthermore, the statement reflected the PAO department’s desire to be a neutral party in the organization for the employees to feel safe to share any issues that may arise. This in turn could create an image of a caring and thus legitimate PAO department for the organization as well as making the members of the department feel needed. The organization has expressed a desire to implement a remote work policy and become a hybrid workplace after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the aim to produce proper outcomes the PAO department started working on the process of creating a remote work policy. By responding to the sources' needs they conformed to the organization's vision and mission of being modern which in the department's view might further establish their commitment and compliance. In turn, the results indicate that this may make them feel as though they are contributing to the organization rather than just being an isolated island. Moreover, processes enabled PAO to produce proper outcomes in their collaboration with managers and gave them a platform to prove that they are there to support the managers. By creating a bond with the managers and being appreciated by them made the members of the PAO department feel valuable, needed, and as if they were a vital success factor for the organization. Therefore, the data indicated that the PAO department's sense of belonging and legitimacy as a part of the organization potentially increased.

6.2. Second Challenge of Gaining Legitimacy

The process of gaining legitimacy contributed to overcoming the second challenge by PAO gaining support from the organizational members to achieve their goal of redefining the organizational core values. This process demonstrated to the organization that their contribution and ideas are valued. Furthermore, by responding to these needs PAO conformed to the beliefs and existing values of the rest of the organization to further unify it and brought legitimacy to PAO as a valuable member of the organization. Additionally, the department responded to the organization's needs when having the culture workshop which generated positive feedback from the attending members. In turn, this further enforced PAO's visibility and perception of others valuing them and their work, speculatively this may have increased PAO's sense of worth and legitimacy within their own department. Moreover, due to the PAO department writing and distributing a culture book including definitions and examples of the organizational culture and its implications on everyday work. By doing that they reinforced the existing values by embedding the culture book as a point of reference when the organizational members are discussing culture. Furthermore, the values discussed and spread by the culture book are largely based on the wider context in which the organization was founded and partially still operates. These values associated with the context of the origin are thus embedded in the organizational culture throughout various contexts enforcing unity and cohesive standards which in turn promotes PAO and their legitimacy within the organization. Additionally, the culture book was published externally to emphasize and represent the organizational core values and culture to those who are interested in the organization as a workplace. Through these actions, the PAO department has shown that their work is embedded in the organization as a valuable contribution governing the morality of the organization's actions within the specific context.

Moreover, the PAO department had expressed worry over unity and their own integrity being compromised when advertising the processes that they sent out not being followed up to an acceptable standard. This affects the PAO department negatively both within their own team as well as out in the organization due to themselves not feeling as though they are producing processes of value. Thus not implementing the strategy of manipulating the organization's way of working. Further, this may have created a feeling of managers and employees not taking PAO's work seriously and consequently delegitimated PAO in the process.

The PAO department had set out to reach a goal of maintaining and repairing the sense of being *one company* through enhancing unity and fostering relationships across departments. Working as one company fostered relationships that enabled PAO to maintain and repair their legitimate status among the organization and its members. Furthermore, PAO protected their accomplishment of an image reflecting one unified company throughout various contexts. In this attempt to maintain legitimacy, the PAO department was able to see themselves as a part of the company as well as felt proud of the created unity. These feelings could have increased their legitimacy. However, due to differences across contexts, the unity had been under scrutiny. However, to gain new sources of legitimacy, PAO manipulated the organization by proselytizing the managers in varying contexts to become one unit as well as for it to reflect the prevailing values. In doing so, the PAO department's goal was to create equal opportunities and rights for all organizational members. Members of the team expressed worry regarding the differences in working conditions, however, as new information had recently surfaced, no further actions had been taken. Although the team attempted to overcome the lack of unity by proselytizing, they had been unsuccessful in implementing equality throughout contexts and processes. Through the effort of creating unity and equality, the PAO department attempted to convince the organization that they were operating with the organizational members' best interests in mind, which potentially promoted the organizations' perceptions of PAO. However, as the attempts had not been completely carried out yet, the organization had expressed dissatisfaction with PAO's processes, which could have negatively affected their legitimacy. Within the PAO department, the Head of PAO had made a moral effort to demonstrate the team members' **success** through affirmations and reassurance. Thus creating a sense of psychological safety and belonging for the team members, these efforts manipulated the team members into feeling as though they are producing valuable projects both for the team itself as well as the organization. Further, the confidence that this brought within the department may be reflected in their efforts in the organization as they had been affirmed to believe that they had brought value and created change within the organization.

Finally, the atmosphere within the team was affected by the *honeymoon phase* by the team attempting to normalize the lack of constructive criticism. The team employed repairing strategies to attempt to move forward and be able to be productive and open with each other. However, this attempt was hindered by some team members denying any negative effects of being a new team. Furthermore, the PAO team excused the possible negative effect by not wanting to be the one disrupting the friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, they believed that constructive criticism could be better received from an authoritative figure thus further excusing themselves from the responsibility.

7. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings and analysis presented above in the light of the aim of the thesis as well as considers the contributions made to the fields of HR and Agile in the light of previous studies as well as when considering implications for practitioners. Additionally, the authors suggest some future research ideas based on limitations they faced.

7.1. In Relation to the Aim and RQs

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how the legitimacy of the HR department had been gained by a departmental reorganization during an ongoing global crisis. To achieve this goal, a case study within an HR department in a global organization was conducted. The study included qualitative observation of meetings within that HR department as well as individual interviews with all members of the HR team. In doing so, issues related to legitimacy and the reorganization as well as the organization as a whole during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic were discussed to achieve a comprehensive picture of the working methods and perceptions of the respondents. The results generated from the case study indicated that the reorganization has greatly affected how the HR department works both within their own team as well as with other teams in the organization. The modern take on their work is reflected in the name *PAO* as well as in implementing the Agile methodology which was already widely used within the organization. Therefore, emphasizing the organizational culture as well as attempting to become more visible in the organization. The reorganization had been affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which had altered how the organization works and what topics had become more urgent for the PAO department to address. The pandemic sped up the reorganization process due to the prevailing government's recommendations to implement distance work, however, it also created some hindrances by affecting the organizational member's ability to create relationships with each other while not being able to meet face to face.

The thesis was framed with two research questions: (1) **How can HR professionals gain legitimacy from their own perspective during a reorganization,** and **(2) How does COVID-19 influence HR legitimacy work?** In regard to the first research question, the PAO team was building their legitimacy through everyday work, and collaborations with the organization. The reorganization played a predominant part in the process to gain legitimacy through the various changes and additions to PAO's way of working. These changes included implementing the Agile framework to structure collaborations as well as making their everyday work more visible. Further, the reorganization entailed expanding the team as well as adding and clarifying the roles to reflect the emphasis on *People* rather than *Human Resources* to uphold their modern image. Additionally, to create legitimacy for themselves they aimed to become more visible in the organization. This was done by inviting organizational members to cooperate in their tasks as well as by inviting themselves to participate more in the organization and become more aware of the organizational needs. PAO deemed striving for unity as an important task to ensure that all organizational members have equal opportunities. Furthermore, lack of unity has been widely discussed by the organization, thus catering to this need PAO highlighted their importance as an organization member, therefore, gaining legitimacy through this endeavor. Throughout PAO's work, they collaborate with managers by empowering them to achieve their and the organization's goals. Empowering managers increased PAO's visibility as well as ability to become a vital partner in the organization, which in turn had increased their legitimacy. The department's ability to make decisions and affect the working conditions had been enforced by their collaboration with the organization's leadership team. However, PAO and the importance of their contributions had on occasion been somewhat undermined within the leadership team which had decreased their sense of importance thus affecting their legitimacy. Furthermore, another part of the reorganization was implementing an agile framework that was already used widely in the organization. The framework further assisted PAO's collaboration with the organization by creating a common language and working methods that simplified cross-department collaboration. This abridged and simplified PAO's ability to structure and contribute their own work based on organizational needs thus strengthening their position in the organization as well as teamwork within the department. The importance of teamwork became emphasized as the department expanded and the global COVID-19 pandemic imposed new challenges. Which is addressed in the second research question of the thesis: **How does the COVID-19 pandemic influence HR legitimacy work?**

The pandemic forced the organization to shift to remote work in a timely manner thus speeding up the ongoing reorganization. As mentioned, the importance of teamwork became highlighted due to various changes and attempts to gain legitimacy. Thus including an agile coach in the PAO team was crucial to be able to implement the agile framework and standardize meetings to improve remote work. Further, the framework promoted communication by increasing meetings within PAO as well as providing more opportunities for transparency during the new meetings. However, PAO as a team was still in the first stage of team development which affected their efficiency due to them being less prone to give constructive criticism to maintain a friendly atmosphere. This had affected the legitimacy within the team, as it remained unclear how open and comfortable they could be with one another, which in turn hindered communication and decreased their legitimacy. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected their ability to meet each other and create bonds face-to-face thus stagnating their ability to move quicker in their team development. Furthermore, the pandemic and implementing remote work created a desire within the organization to continue working partly remotely after the pandemic as well. Therefore, the PAO team has been in the process of responding to this need by creating a hybrid work policy to also reflect this increasingly popular modern way of working. By doing so, the department has gained reliance from the organization, which has promoted their legitimacy.

7.2 Previous Studies

According to Heizmann & Fox (2017), there are difficulties for the HR department when it comes to maintaining the employee champion image as well as being a strategic partner within the organization which in turn affects their legitimacy due to the duality of their roles. However, this thesis clearly demonstrates that an HR department is able to address both strategic questions as well as keep the employees' best interests in mind. The PAO department demonstrates this by having invested in being a larger team to be able to divide and structure the roles to further address this challenge. Although, as stated by Guest and King (2004), the ambiguity the traditional HR roles entail forces the members of the HR department to fight for equal power and legitimacy among other departments. As the findings of this thesis showcase, the HR department faced some difficulties in obtaining an equal spotlight within the leadership team, as the rest of the members tended to consider their work as more relevant to the operation of the organization. However, the HR department experienced themselves as valued members with freedom and trust from the leadership team to make independent decisions to contribute to the wellbeing of the organization. Therefore, the findings of this thesis contradict Guest and King's (2004) statement about HR lacking power and authority within an organization due to the duality of their role. Speculatively, this difference might have been enforced by the culture and hierarchical differences in the organizations as well as the vast time gap between the studies. Additionally, Lees (2006) claims that the HR department must consider how they are being perceived from the organization's perspective in order to obtain a legitimate strategic partner status as well as consider incorporating the social and cultural environment into their actions. Similarly, this thesis found that the HR department is operating in line with this statement by creating a tonality and image of their organization mainly based on their desire to reflect a modern company both as a department as well as an organization. This was reflected through their published culture book as well as the cohesive tonality in their job advertisements. Furthermore, their legitimate status as a strategic partner in this regard is demonstrated in their close collaboration with the organizational managers when they turn to the HR department to approve the tonality of their projects before being published. Therefore, the findings of this thesis further confirm Lees' (2006) findings. Moreover, Park et. al. (2011) as well as Sandholtz (2020) studied the legitimacy within a department and similarly to this thesis, found that cross-department collaboration and support affected the departments' legitimacy. The collaboration between departments influenced the organization's performance which in turn affected the department's legitimacy according to Park et. al. (2011). Results in this thesis suggest similar findings through HR working with the organization's leadership team, however not enough data was collected to affirm their findings.

In line with the national recommendations for remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Caligiuri et. al., 2020) the case organization implemented remote work, which according to Trainor and Velotti (2013) is part of HR's responsibility when responding to a crisis. The effects of remote work have been discussed manyfold by Ferreira (2021), Jeske (2021), Mello (2007) as well as Müller and Niessen (2019) who concluded that HR's responsibility to ensure smooth operations and communication even from remote locations, which was reinforced by the findings in this thesis as the HR department became responsible for ensuring feelings of belonging and effective communication e.g. through the many events they organized. In this thesis, this also became evident through the implementation of the agile framework, which boosted collaboration and structured work within the HR department as well as improved communication within the organization through enabling using the same language when it comes to terms relating to meetings and events for example. Therefore, in line with Waldrom (2017), the agile framework did create unity within the department but also within the organization. In conclusion, as Capelli and Tavis (2018), Creelman (2020), Kavitha and Suresh (2021), McMackin and Heffernan (2020) claimed, HR is surely but slowly becoming agile.

7.3 Implications in Practice

Despite the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, this thesis demonstrated that the HR department is able to reorganize, implement an agile framework as well as gain, maintain and repair legitimacy when working remotely. Even remotely they were able to remain a very vital part of the organization and their contribution has really furthered the *people-perspective* forward throughout the organization. The focus on the people-perspective has also become more highlighted within the HR field in general, as trends to change the department's name to reflect the modern approach have become broader. Furthermore, this trend has given HR departments a new ability to rebrand themselves and therefore become more integrated in the organization. Moreover, the thesis demonstrates how important both the administrative as well as strategic perspectives of the HR function are for an organization. Additionally, this thesis contributed to the field of agile research by investigating the implementation of agile methods. Although the agile framework was initially developed for the tech industry this thesis has shown the benefits of tailoring the framework to fit the department it is being implemented in. In doing so, it also became very evident how important training is in order to be able to implement the framework and ensure that the organizational members . become familiar with the working methods.

7.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The most prominent limitation this thesis faced was due to solely investigating legitimacy from the HR department's own perspective which affected the sample and possibly influenced the outcome of the results, as mentioned under *Methods.* Therefore, the authors suggest that it would be beneficial for the HR field to conduct a study where viewpoints from both inside and outside the department would be considered. Meaning, data collection should be conducted with both the members of an HR department as well as with those collaborating and existing around HR. In doing so, a more comprehensive image of HR could be obtained to further provide information on this topic as well as to offer an alternative view of HR. Such a study could contribute to research on how HR has been able to become a more strategic partner.

Conducting the thesis remotely became another limiting factor as the work of HR and their collaborations with managers could not be observed. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the organization, as well as the authors, were working remotely due to the local government's restrictions. Therefore, collecting data from organizational members outside the HR department or data from organizational meetings became difficult as no face-to-face collaboration was conducted. Furthermore, observing the daily interaction was difficult due to the absence of spontaneous meetings. Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned suggestion to look into both the factors inside and outside the HR department, it would be beneficial to include observing onsite to investigate the relationships between HR and other managers further to better understand the micro setting of how legitimacy is created.

The agile framework implemented in the HR department became a prominent factor in the thesis. However, as the framework was initially implemented with the reorganization almost a year prior to this thesis, the authors were not able to observe the initial reactions or the start of the implementation. This limitation affected the thesis by hindering the authors' ability to distinguish what effects have been created by the agile framework by having to rely on the respondents' stories instead of having first-hand knowledge through observations of the change process. Due to conducting the thesis during a middle point of implementing the framework, the authors suggest future research investigating both the initial implementation as well the long-term effects on teamwork, efficiency, and collaboration created by the Agile framework to further study how those practices influence legitimacy.

Additional future research suggestions based on the findings of this thesis include conducting this thesis during a point in time when the organization is able to conduct work as usual without the hindrance of a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, it could be beneficial for the field of HR to further investigate the effects of remote work on group dynamics or work across contexts due to the current trends pointing to more extensive implementation of remote work. Finally, visibility became a topic of great importance when gaining legitimacy, therefore exploring the connection between legitimacy and visibility could generate valuable results for the HR profession.

8. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to research the possibility to gain legitimacy for the HR department while going through a reorganization affected by an ongoing global pandemic. Accordingly, the findings of this thesis showed that the HR department was able to gain legitimacy through visibility, collaboration, and unity. The agile framework implemented by the HR department also boosted their legitimacy within the department by increasing the collaboration within the team. Additionally, the agile framework aided in structuring and simplifying their presentations for the rest of the organization by enabling using a language that the rest of the organization also understood. Due to the team growing during the reorganization, they were able to take on more responsibilities and work more across departments which ultimately increased their visibility. Finally, the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic created a sense of urgency to shift to remote work and create new policies and processes, which promoted the already ongoing reorganization.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Guide #1

Background on the Role

- What is your role?
- How would you describe your current role at the organization?

Background on the Reorganization

- What attitude did you have towards the reorganization when it was initiated?
- How do you think the reorganization has affected your work?
- We've heard you describe your work processes as "running with the managers" instead of taking over the task or having a set structure. What do you feel about this approach?
- How would you say COVID has affected your work?

The HR department

- What motivates you to work within the HR department?
- How would you describe the mentality within your department?
- How do the company values manifest in your everyday work?
- You emphasize People and Organization,
- Do you feel valued here? In what way do you feel valued at this organization?
- Do you discuss the importance of PAO or other departments?

Workload and Collaboration

- Who do you believe is mainly responsible for the employee experience?
- Who are you collaborating with? Are they the same people you work with on a regular basis?
- Although, you might not be as involved in administrative tasks, do you think that working with employee experience has changed other employees' perception of you and your role or PAO?

About Agility

- What does agility mean to you?
- How has having a coach affected your work?
- What is the biggest value he is bringing to your department, in your opinion?
- Do you think it helps you collaborate and communicate with other departments? Examples?

Concluding Questions

- What do you think legitimacy is? What does it mean to be legitimate?
- How do you think legitimacy could be gained?

Appendix 2. Interview Guide #2

Legitimacy

- In what way do you and your department create legitimacy for yourselves in your everyday work?
- In what way has communication within your department affected your legitimacy?
- Do you think there are any cultural differences between how you work in comparison to Poland/Sweden?
- Do you believe you need processes to work together in order to reach your goals as a department?
- Do you ever feel like others/managers question PAO or your routines?
- We know you work a lot with Tech and Finance, for example, why?

About Agility

- Do you think working agile affects legitimacy?
- What benefits come from becoming more agile when working in a tech company, which at its core, is an agile industry?
- Do you have a common language, how, what?
- Do you think it can affect how PAO is perceived?

Visibility

- Why have you become more visible, how?
- How has that affected the department?
- Do you think it is important to be visible, why?
- You participate in the leadership meetings, what value does that bring, in your experience?

Feedback

- The last time we asked about the mentality of the department and you seem like a really good group with a couple of new people and so on. However, is there anything in your team that you feel is not working as well or you need more of?
- To our understanding, you are all very positive about your teamwork, however, that made us wonder, where is space for critique or improvement ideas? If there is any…

Concluding Questions

- Is there anything we haven't already addressed that you wish to bring up or talk further about?
- From all the aspects given to us today, what would you say is the most important take-home message?

Appendix 3. Interview Invitation

Dear XXX,

We hope you are doing well!

Thank you for booking the time for an interview with us for the Master Thesis!

The interview will focus on legitimacy within the PAO department and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your reorganization. The interview is a part of our Master's Thesis in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labour relations at the University of Gothenburg.

We are interested in your experiences and your role regarding the possible changes and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how you yourselves see the PAO department. With your permission, the interview will be recorded so it can be transcribed for further analysis. The transcription will be made available to you upon request. The transcribed material will be anonymized both in regard to personal identity and your organization. After completion of the thesis, your recording will be deleted.

Considering Google Meet will not allow us to record the meeting we will attach a link for a a Zoom-room and look forward to meeting you there.

https://gu-se.zoom.us/my/xxxxxx

The duration for the interview will be 60 minutes. During the interview you may choose to not answer any questions and you also have the possibility to withdraw from the study or exclude any answers up to 14 days after the interview has been conducted.

Below in the attached file you can find further information, contact details and consent form, that we wish you to sign and send back to us prior to the interview.

Best regards,

XXX