



**INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIOLOGI
OCH ARBETSVETENSKAP**

In search of identity, mission and meaning
A study of HR Practitioners in Sweden

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Abstract

Different models concerning human resources management, often of American origin, have had a major impact on the working methods in the field of human resources (HR) and thus on how HR practitioners perceive their mission, professional role, and need for knowledge. These models have heavily emphasized that HR functions have a strategic role, a natural position in management teams, and that HR creates value for organizations. These messages have resonated well with HR practitioners, especially in private organizations. However, the business partner model has also caused tensions and ambiguities in relation to HR functions and practitioners in a Swedish context.

The overall aim of this thesis is to identify tensions and strategies among HR practitioners in the introduction of the HRT model and to critically discuss how HR practitioners assert their professional field, roles, and expertise during a period characterized by changes in working methods and organization.

The main findings show that the business partner model had a negative impact on developing and sharing knowledge within HR functions due to the division and specialization in the model. The business partner model also complicated cooperation between HR functions and line managers due to how the model fragmented HR work and outsourced certain HR processes, such as recruitment, but also the use of external consultant services. Line managers were hesitant regarding the strategic mission of HR and wanted closer support that was more adapted to local conditions, such as local agreements. The HR occupation in Sweden, on the other hand, proved to be surprisingly well-established, with a cohesive professional group and a uniform educational structure dominated by the social sciences. There was also a clear historical continuity through a social perspective having shaped a professional identity centered on the human perspective in organizations.

An overall implication is that a greater sensitivity to cultural conditions is required when introducing new HRM management models into organizations.

The possibilities and limitations of the current professionalization situation are the subject of an in-depth discussion. The strong focus on traditional HR activities from a behavioral and social science perspective has resulted in a strong professional identity and a core competence in operational and administrative work. However, the possibilities to work in areas such as innovation, digitalization, and board issues are more limited. It is argued that the HR function may need to engage in closer collaborations with other functions. HRM is not an area that lends itself to professional dominance. On the contrary, it could be an area for cross-professional collaboration as no single function can master the full complexity of integrating people into productive and development-oriented organizational affairs.

Key words: contextualization, HRBP role, HRM, HRT, paradox theory, professionalism, qualitative, thematic analysis, tension theory

Papers:

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- III. Häll, A., Hällsten, F., & Tengblad, S. Bidde det bara en tummetott? En studie om HR-yrkets professionalism. *Planned submission*.
- IV. Häll, A., & Tengblad, S. Personalvetarrollen efter 100 år – en reflektion kring personalvetares professionalisering. In *Med empati och strategi. En antologi om HR och framtiden*. Flavad, M. (ed.), Premiss förlag, 2024, pp. 11–26