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”Treat others in the way they want to be treated”

An exploratory study on the usage of personality assessment tools and how it impacts employee engagement

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Abstract

This thesis examines the usage of personality assessment tools for developmental purposes in the organizational context. The purpose of the thesis has been to investigate if personality assessment tools can be used as a mean to increase employee engagement, and if so, in what way. To answer this, a case study of two multinational companies has been conducted. In the companies, 20 in-depth interviews with employees from four different teams were carried out. The findings suggest the participants experienced the usage of assessment tools positively, where the most rewarding outcome was the increased knowledge about colleagues. The experienced value creation is mainly related to how the assessment test is bundled with associated activities, rather than the validity of the test itself. Further, the manager’s interest in personality profiling is of significant importance when it comes to the way the assessment tools are looked upon and used. Theory and empirical findings support that the usage of personality assessment tools, through an increased awareness about one’s own and others’ preferences, enables opportunities for adaptation of behavior. If organizations adapt to expressed employee preferences regarding work design and rewards, the thesis supports that the usage of personality assessment tools has a positive impact on employee engagement.

Key words: Employee engagement, personality assessment tools, HR practices

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1. Introduction

The introduction begins with a background explanation to employee engagement and how it is manifested in organizations today. Companies' increasing focus on the individual employee in order to reach improved business performance is also visualized. Subsequently, the chapter continues by introducing the research problem, purpose of the thesis and the research questions. The introductory section is then finished off with an explanation of demarcations and the disposition of the thesis.

1.1. Background

In a broad, world-wide study containing employees working in various companies from different industries, it is stated that only 13% of the employees are engaged at their job, meaning that they are, in their day-to-day operations, focused in the value creation at their respective company.[1] That figure can be put in relation to the number of actively disengaged employees of roughly 25%. A disengaged worker is one who might be hostile towards the organisation and also deliberately contribute negatively in the value process. Other global studies on the topic present comparable results: According to Corporate Leadership Council, 11% of the workforce is strongly committed, while 13% actively oppose something in the organization.[2] Towers Watson have in their Global Workforce Study concluded that 35% are highly engaged, 22% unsupported, 17% detached and 26% disengaged.[3] The methods of measuring engagement levels vary, yet it indicates that a high portion of the workforce is actively disengaged in contributing to the success of the company while a fairly low portion of the workforce is engaged in the value creation of their company.

The importance of employee engagement and its impact on business performance has been studied by a great number of scholars in recent decades.[4] The research ranges from explanatory models of

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[1] Gallup State of the Global Workplace Report 2013 p. 8

[2] Corporate Leadership Council (2004). Driving Performance and Retention Through Employee Engagement. Corporate Executive Board, Washington, D.C., USA.

[3] Towers Watson (2012). Global Workforce Study 2012. Towers Watson, New York City, NY, USA.

[4] Examples of researchers studying the subject:

- Guest, D. E. (1997). Human resource management and performance: a review and research agenda. International Journal of Human Resource Management, 8(3), 263-276.
- Markos, S., & Sridevi, M. S. (2010). Employee Engagement: The Key to Improving Performance. International Journal of Business & Management, 5(12).
- Utman, C. H. (1997). Performance effects of motivational state: A meta-analysis. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 1(2), 170-182.
- Schneider, B., Hanges, P. J., Smith, D. B., & Salvaggio, A. N. (2003). Which comes first: employee attitudes or organizational financial and market performance?. Journal of Applied Psychology, 88(5), 836.
- Becker, T. E., Billings, R. S., Eveleth, D. M., & Gilbert, N. L. (1996). Foci and bases of employee commitment: Implications for job performance. Academy of management journal, 39(2), 464-482.
- Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). People management and performance. Routledge.
- Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: a meta-analysis. Journal of applied psychology, 87(2), 268.

the relationship between strategy, engagement and performance; to suggestions on best practices for various situations and profiles. Heskett and Schlesinger explain how employee satisfaction generates employee loyalty, impacting customer satisfaction and thereby profitability and growth in service firms.[5] Harter et al. performed a study in 7939 business units, showing that there is a positive correlation between employee satisfaction, employee engagement and business unit outcomes of productivity, profit, employee, turnover, employee accidents and customer satisfaction.[6] Schneider et al. show that an overall job satisfaction has a positive impact on financial performance and market performance.[7] Apart from the positive effects of employee engagement, there are also costs associated with disengagement. Gallup has, based on their employee engagement survey results, looked into the cost of disengaged workers in the US, estimating the costs to be in the range of US $450 billion - $ 550 billion per year.[8]

So given its value for business performance, how can the levels of employee engagement be increased? Before answering the question, the term employee engagement needs to be understood. William Kahn was first to define employee engagement when he described it as "*… the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances.".*[9] Since then, numerous scholars and practitioners have absorbed and developed the concept. A number of definitions exist, yet the exact meaning of the concept is still ambiguous. After a review of current definitions, Macey and Schneider conclude that employee engagement is "*a desirable condition, with an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, having both attitudinal and behavioral components".*[10] Employee engagement is an overarching concept that includes job satisfaction, organizational commitment, psychological empowerment

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- Bowen, D. E., & Ostroff, C. (2004). Understanding HRM–firm performance linkages: The role of the "strength" of the HRM system. Academy of management review, 29(2), 203-221.
- Baard, P. P., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2004). Intrinsic Need Satisfaction: A Motivational Basis of Performance and Weil-Being in Two Work Settings1. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 34(10), 2045-2068.
- Meere, M., & Street, J. (2005). High cost of disengaged employees. Victoria: Swinburne University of Technology.
- Wright, P. M., Gardner, T. M., Moynihan, L. M., & Allen, M. R. (2005). The relationship between HR practices and firm performance: Examining causal order. Personnel Psychology, 58(2), 409-446.
- Kehoe, R. R., & Wright, P. M. (2013). The impact of high-performance human resource practices on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Journal of Management, 39(2), 366-391.

[5] Heskett, J. L., & Schlesinger, L. A. (1994). Putting the service-profit chain to work. *Harvard business review*, 72(2), 164-174.

[6] Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Hayes, T. L. (2002). Business-unit-level relationship between employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and business outcomes: a meta-analysis

[7] Schneider, B., Hanges, P. J., Smith, D. B., & Salvaggio, A. N. (2003). Which comes first: employee attitudes or organizational financial and market performance?

[8] Gallup (2013). State of the Global Workplace Report 2013

[9] Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of management journal*, *33*(4), 692-724.

[10] Macey, W. H., Schneider, B., Barbera, K. M., & Young, S. A. (2009). *Employee engagement: Tools for analysis, practice, and competitive advantage*. John Wiley & Sons.

and job involvement. Building on previous concepts as job satisfaction, employee commitment and organizational citizenship behavior, employee engagement stands out as being dependent on the two-way communication between employee and employer.[11] Abraham investigated the effect of job satisfaction on employee engagement and found that job satisfaction is an important driver of employee engagement.[12]

As a driver of business performance in the current environment, employee engagement might be even more important in the future due to three trends: Firstly, the performance impact of highly engaged employees is more evident in professional service firms where the tasks are complex and are dependent on a certain degree of creativity and innovation.[13] This finding is of significance given the growing importance of knowledge intensive work in western world's post-industrialized societies. Secondly, the emergence of the generation Y on the labour market requires changes in the way employers relate to employee engagement. Due to their need for meaningful and challenging work, demand of immediate feedback and sense of immediacy, managers are required to master coaching skills to keep this generation focused and motivated.[14] Lastly, a job-market trend that has been on the rise the last decade is the growing narcissism among employees, which manifests itself in a strong focus in self-development and self-motivation.[15] This trend is also supported by Daniel Pink and his suggested approach to focus on more intrinsically motivating factors.[16]

Concluding finding 1

Employee engagement is important as it drives business performance, yet it is hard to reach high levels of it.

Managers indisputably argue the demand for efficiency and productivity is higher nowadays than it has been historically.[17] A strive for improvements of the performance is constantly present. As the technology evolves, more workers with technical and professional skills appear in the organisations, workers, which do not let themselves be managed in the old authoritarian way but instead demands more autonomy, status and satisfaction.[18] Managers have seen it and consequently shift more focus towards the employee side of the organisation. They have realised employee engagement can be a facilitator creating more efficiency and productivity.[19] Research suggests that top-performing managers have a management style where they focus on the

[11] Markos, S., & Sridevi, M. S. (2010). Employee Engagement: The Key to Improving Performance.

[12] Abraham, S. (2012). Job Satisfaction as an Antecedent to Employee Engagement. *SIES Journal of Management*, *8*(2).

[13] Judge, T. A., Thoresen, C. J., Bono, J. E., & Patton, G. K. (2001). The job satisfaction–job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review. *Psychological bulletin*, 127(3), 376.

[14] Martin, C. A. (2005). From high maintenance to high productivity: What managers need to know about Generation Y. *Industrial and commercial training*, *37*(1), 39-44.

[15] Hedegaard Hein, H. (2012). Motivation: Motivationsteorier och praktisk tillämpning. *Malmö: Liber AB*. sid 222-224

[16] Pink, D. H. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. Penguin.

[17] Markos, S., & Sridevi, M. S. (2010). Employee Engagement: The Key to Improving Performance.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

individual under their management and focus on improving their strengths.[20] Hence, top-managers positively affect efficiency and engagement by understanding their employees on the individual level.[21]

There are different ways to drive and measure employee engagement, where a common approach is with the help of surveys.[22] With surveys, engagement levels in the organization can be identified and benchmarked, and work environment conditions related to employee engagement can be recognized.[23] However, different shortcomings accompanied with the use of engagement surveys can be discovered. Firstly, it relies on the test-takers ability to self-report their level of engagement, and there are research suggesting a self-serving bias when answering questions on your behavior and performance.[24] Secondly, the drivers of employee engagement might not be essential to all employees, i.e. improvement of the engagement levels might be conditional of the individual employee rather than the aggregated outcome. Thirdly, adjustments of engagement drivers have a short lasting effect if they are not aligned with other parts of the company strategy and HR practices. Lastly, while the engagement surveys might be suited to measure employee engagement, it is the behavioural engagement that will have an impact on the job performance.[25] Except from surveys, there are also other ways to work with employee engagement. One example is Crabb who suggests coaching sessions or coaching dialogues as an alternative way to work with employee engagement.[26] Crabb recommends coaching dialogues in order to help the subordinates utilize their strengths, become more resilient and find meaning in what they do.[27] By that, organizations begin to focus on positive coaching in order to enhance employees' skills and thereby improve performance, instead of plugging development gaps to meet an acceptable level.[28]

Nevertheless, the usage of survey tools and individual coaching as a way to work with employee engagement comes with both pros and cons. While surveys provide an efficient quantification of the whole company's engagement levels and enables company-wide changes on the basis of the results, individual coaching can be more efficient in identifying and finding ways to develop the individual, although in a small scale. However, an activity which combines the efficiency of surveys with the quality of coaching, is the usage of personality assessment tools. In the wake of additional focus on employee engagement, but without the necessary increase in resources to handle the task,

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[20] Clifton, D. O., & Harter, J. K. (2003). Investing in strengths. *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*, 111-121.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Gallup (2013). State of the Global Workplace Report 2013
[23] Macey, W. H., Schneider, B., Barbera, K. M., & Young, S. A. (2009). *Employee engagement: Tools for analysis, practice, and competitive advantage*.
[24] Johns, G. (1994). Absenteeism estimates by employees and managers: Divergent perspectives and self-serving perceptions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79, 229–239.
[25] Gruman, J. A., & Saks, A. M. (2011). Performance management and employee engagement. *Human Resource Management Review*, *21*(2), 123-136.
[26] Crabb, S. (2011). The use of coaching principles to foster employee engagement. *The Coaching Psychologist*, *7*(1), 27-34.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

personality assessment tools has become an interesting option to help tackle the issue for HR-departments and first line managers.

Concluding finding 2
Using assessment tools for developmental purposes offers an opportunity to, in a cost and time efficient way, understand individuals' drivers for employee engagement.

1.2. Research problem

Given the background presented in previous section, employee engagement is positively correlated with business performance and is of greater importance due to a number of shifting trends. Yet, it is apparently challenging to achieve high levels of employee engagement, leading to unnecessary costs and lost opportunities for increased profits. In order to increase the levels of employee engagement, companies need efficient and accurate strategies and tools. A number of companies are offering different kinds of assessment tools and associated services, aimed at identifying and developing the understanding for employees' individual preferences.

Research related to these tools treats mainly the existence of different personalities, the validity of the tools and how to identify what profiles are best suited for certain roles and companies.[29, 30] One less studied area is how the use of this kind of tools is experienced in practice. Muchinsky describes this distance between research and practice as the 'science-practitioner gap'. [31] This gap concerns the practical consequences associated with the *process of using any tool* rather than a more descriptive approach of *test results* and the applicability of certain tools. For that reason, this thesis will focus on investigating the experience of using an assessment tool, and the results associated with the process as such, rather than evaluating any specific assessment tool.

1.2.1. Purpose

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate if the usage of personality assessment tools can be used as a mean to increase employee engagement, and if so, in what way.

1.2.2. Research questions

How is the usage of personality assessment tools initiated and implemented by companies and how is the process experienced by the employees?

What are the effects of using personality assessment tools and how does it impact employee engagement?

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[29] Goodstein, L. D., & Lanyon, R. I. (1999). Applications of personality assessment to the workplace: A review. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *13*(3), 291-322.
[30] Costa, P. T., McCrae, R. R., & Kay, G. G. (1995). Persons, places, and personality: Career assessment using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *3*(2), 123-139.
[31] Muchinsky, P. M. (2004). When the psychometrics of test development meets organizational realities: A conceptual framework for organizational change, examples, and recommendations. *Personnel Psychology*, *57*(1), 175-209.

1.2.3. Initial demarcation

As stated earlier in the introduction, there are many definitions of employee engagement. Having both attitudinal and behavioral components, the concept is closely related to a number of similar concepts, e.g. job satisfaction, motivation, organizational commitment, job involvement and discretionary behavior. Since the purpose of the thesis primarily is to investigate the usage of personality assessment tools, the concept of employee engagement will be used in fairly broad terms and sometimes touch upon and be used interchangeably with associated concepts. The reason for this is that we want to eliminate the potential confusion among interviewees and the reader, moving focus from the assessment tools to conceptual discussions.

1.3. Disposition

The first part of the study (chapter 1) has introduced the reader to the concept of employee engagement, provided a background to the current situation in the area and introduced the concept of assessment tools. The subsequent section (chapter 2) provides an outline of the literature review, where theories demonstrated lay the foundation for the theoretical framework used in the study. This is then followed by the methodology (chapter 3), which explains the methods used and choices made in the creation of the thesis. Exploration of the empirical findings is subsequently presented in the following section (chapter 4), which is followed by the analysis (chapter 5) where the theoretical framework is put to use in order to address and elaborate on the research question. All the analyzed findings are then summarized in the part containing the concluding findings (chapter 6). The thesis is finally finished off with a brief discussion considering the contributions, implications, limitations and areas for further research (chapter 7). Additional information to the thesis is then found in the two following sections containing references and appendix (chapter 8 and 9).

2. Literature review

The literature review will be based on three key areas: First, the area of assessment tools will be reviewed briefly. Second, human resource management practices and their implementation will be described on the basis of Purcell et al.'s HR causal value chain model. Last, a theoretical framework to be used for further analysis will be presented.

2.1. Personality assessment tools

The usage of psychological tests and personality assessment tools with the purpose to identify certain traits and behaviors among potential and existing employees has increased in popularity over the past years. [32] Kaplan and Saccazzo define a psychological test as "*... a set of items that are designed to measure characteristics of human beings that pertain to behavior."*[33] Two types of tests can be identified: ability tests and personality tests, where the first refers to the achievement, aptitude and intelligence; while personality tests are focused on describing a certain behavior or responses to given situations.[34] Research in the area points out a number of benefits and areas of usage, comprehensively summarized by Sjöberg:[35]

- Legitimize the organization's technical/scientific level
- Legitimize hiring decisions
- Contribute to increased self-awareness
- Create a basis for a potential interview or appraisals by increasing the interviewer's understanding of the interviewee's personality
- Create motivation and credibility so that sensitive subjects can be discussed
- Give a basis for associations to the parties in an interview, so that interesting and unexpected themes can be discussed
- Signal that the company is interested in the test taker and their personality

2.1.1. The development of assessments tools

The usage of personality tests can be traced back to World War I and Woodworth's Personal Data Sheet, where soldiers' prone to nervous breakdowns was tested.[36] Since then, numerous more or less spread theories have been developed. Jung's theory is often considered as being among the most prominent theories, where he distinguishes between the two general attitude types: introversion and extraversion; and four function-types: thinking, feeling, sensing, intuition.[37] Jung's theories have been used for developing additional assessment tools, e.g. Myer-Briggs Type

[32] Tippins, N. (2009). Internet alternatives to traditional proctored testing: Where are we now?. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, *2*(1), 2.
[33] Kaplan, R., & Saccuzzo, D. (2008). *Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues*. Cengage Learning. p 6
[34] Ibid p 8
[35] Sjöberg, L. (2000). Personlighetstest i arbetslivet: Historik och aktuell forskning. *Stockholm: Ekonomiska forskningsinstitutet, Handelshögskolan*. (Authors' translation)
[36] Kaplan, R., & Saccuzzo, D. (2008). *Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues*. p. 17
[37] Jung, C. G. (1923). Psychological types. *New York*.

Indicator, one of the most used tools.[38] In recent years, the popularity of the so called Big Five has increased.[39] This theory is based on the five personality dimensions: extraversion; emotional stability; agreeableness; conscientiousness, and openness to experience.[40] Researchers have found that the use of the Big Five has been successful in predicting workplace behavior and job performance. [41, 42, 43, 44, 45] Even if the relevance of assessment tools has been demonstrated, others have found downsides related to bad validity and relevance.[46, 47]

2.1.2. Selection vs. development

Assessment tools are typically used for two main purposes: employee selection or training and development.[48] The former relates to the process of identifying certain traits and skills among the pool of applicants and matching them with the desired profile of the vacancy. The main benefit from using assessment tools in recruitment processes is that early personality tests can predict employee fit, performance, risk of theft, compatibility with company values, and leadership potential.[49 ,50]

Using assessment tools for development purposes is by far not as common as using it for recruitment purposes. The use of assessments is often a part of leadership development programs where the participants get to understand their strengths and weaknesses and thereby enable the highest payoff on developmental activities.[51] The structures vary, but some common characteristics can be identified. The test is often taken online, often in the form of different statement that are valued on a Likert scale or in relation to each other. The test results are then aggregated into a written report that is shared with the test taker.

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[38] Kaplan, R., & Saccuzzo, D. (2008). *Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues*. p. 518
[39] John, O. P., Naumann, L. P., & Soto, C. J. (2008). Paradigm shift to the integrative big five trait taxonomy. *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, *3*, 114-158.
[40] Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: a meta-analysis. *Personnel psychology*, *44*(1), 1-26.
[41] ibid
[42] Tett, R. P., Jackson, D. N., & Rothstein, M. (1991). Personality measures as predictors of job performance: a meta-analytic review. *Personnel psychology*, *44*(4), 703-742.
[43] Hurtz, G. M., & Donovan, J. J. (2000). Personality and job performance: the Big Five revisited. *Journal of applied psychology*, *85*(6), 869.
[44] Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: a meta-analysis.
[45] Judge, T. A., & Ilies, R. (2002). Relationship of personality to performance motivation: a meta-analytic review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *87*(4), 797.
[46] McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1989). Reinterpreting the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator From the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model of Personality. *Journal of personality*, *57*(1), 17-40.
[47] Boyle, G. J. (1995). Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI): Some Psychometric Limitations. *Australian Psychologist*, *30*(1), 71-74.
[48] Goodstein, L. D., & Lanyon, R. I. (1999). Applications of personality assessment to the workplace: A review.
[49] Rothstein, M. G., & Goffin, R. D. (2006). The use of personality measures in personnel selection: What does current research support?. *Human Resource Management Review*, *16*(2), 155-180.
[50] Goodstein, L. D., & Lanyon, R. I. (1999). Applications of personality assessment to the workplace: A review.
[51] Reynolds, D. H. Implementing Assessment Technologies. *Technology-Enhanced Assessment of Talent*, 66-98.

2.1.3. Cheating at assessments

One prerequisite for a valid test is that the input is accurate and reflects the personality of the test taker. The level of reliability of a test expresses the degree to which the test is free of measurement errors and if the same or similar results will be achieved if the test is given twice.[52] If the questions are answered wrongly, the test will generate an inaccurate profile. Social desirability responding refers to respondents' conscious over-reporting of socially desirable personal characteristics.[53] The unconscious equivalent, self-deception, is when the respondent due to lack of self-awareness reports herself in an inaccurately favorable way.[54]

2.1.4. Practical application of assessment tools

Despite its popularity among practitioners, research relating to practical implementation of assessment tools has not received as much attention as e.g. validity and the fit of different profiles and traits in certain settings. Muchinski refers to the *"scientist-practitioner gap"* as the mismatch between scientists suggested theories, principles and methods; and the practitioners' challenges in dealing with the often complex implementation.[55] Furthermore, he argues that human resources departments typically have limited organizational power when it comes to implementation in practice, something that is not considered in the often prescriptive research.[56]

2.2. The HR causal value chain model

Human resource management (HRM) is the academic area focusing on employee performance through usage of different systems, processes and practices. Research covers detailed models, focusing on specific practices or perspectives on HRM to more generic models aiming to describe HRM practices on a higher level. One of those models is the HR causal value chain model developed by Purcell et al. The model is developed from the previous work by Wright and Nishii, resulting in the model covering six key features, illustrated in the model below.[57] The main purpose of the model is to bring attention to a number of events:[58]

- The need to distinguish between the intended and the actual HR practices as experienced by the employees
- The importance of line managers when it comes to interpreting and implementing HR practices
- The link between experienced practices and employee attitudes and behaviors

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[52] Kaplan, R., & Saccuzzo, D. (2008). Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues. p. 10

[53] Arthur Jr, W., & Glaze, R. M. (2011). Cheating and Response Distortion on Remotely Delivered Assessments. *Technology-Enhanced Assessment of Talent*, *30*, 99. p 120

[54] Ibid.

[55] Muchinsky, P. M. (2004). When the psychometrics of test development meets organizational realities: A conceptual framework for organizational change, examples, and recommendations.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Wright, P. M., & Nishii, L. H. (2007). Strategic HRM and organizational behavior: Integrating multiple levels of analysis (CAHRS Working Paper# 07-03). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations. *Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies*.

[58] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*..

- The choice of performance measures that has meaning and significance for the companies and at the same time are close to the employee attitudinal data
- The importance of organizational culture

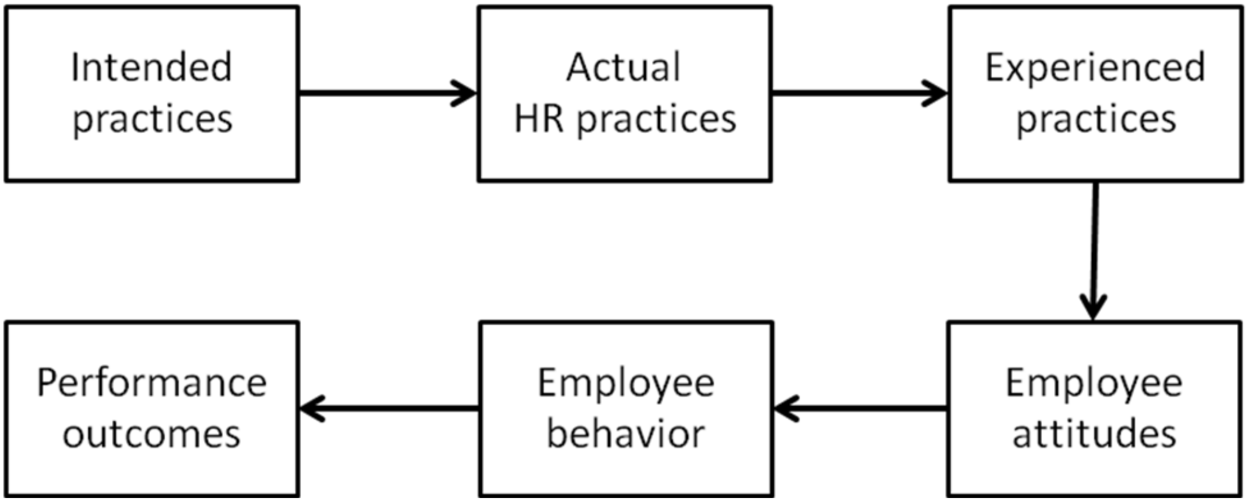

Figure 1 – Purcell et al.'s HR causal chain model

2.2.1. Intended practices

Intended practices refer to the strategic decisions related to employees' ability, motivation and opportunity to participate. The desired outcomes from a practice are adjusted in the intended practices, where top management takes a strategic approach towards what to do and how to achieve certain outcomes.[59]

The distinction between *best practice* and *best fit* is discussed.[60] The first refers to successful practices that can be applied to any organization. Various practices are pointed out, even if most scholars come back to the common practices recruitment and selection; training and development; and performance management. Best fit stresses the importance of a good fit between practices and the external and internal dimensions of the organization, such as company strategy, structure, company life cycle and processes. By ensuring that the HR practices are consistent with the overall business strategy, the risk of misalignment between intended practice and what takes place in reality is reduced. Bowen & Ostroff stress that a strong HRM system can foster an organization where everyone see the situations similarly, resulting in consistency in perception and behaviors.[61]

2.2.2. Actual practices

Actual practices treats the situations that occur when the intended practices are about to be implemented, often under the responsibility of a first line manager (FLM). This is a common challenge, where difficulties in ensuring that the intended practices are implemented accordingly

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Bowen, D. E., & Ostroff, C. (2004). Understanding HRM–firm performance linkages: The role of the "strength" of the HRM system.

to intentions often arise.[62] The first line manager is pointed out as being of great importance as it is the person whom often acts as the intermediary between the HR strategy and the employees. Despite the important role of the FLMs, the role has been exposed to an increasing workload in the form of additional activities, many related to HR management.[63]

Three main challenges are pointed out: (1) *Skills and knowledge* refers to the need of certain skills for a successful implementation of HR practices. Many managers believe that they need to improve their skills, but that they request additional training in order to master the skills required.[64] (2) C*ommitment to people management* treats the manager's interest in personnel developmental activities in relation to pure business activities. McGovern et al. have found that managers often perceive a limited incentive to engage in HR practices, and that involvement is a result of personal interest rather than institutional motivation.[65] (3) *Competing priorities and work overload* is a recognized issue for FLMs. As a result of downsizing, delayering and the transfer of traditional HR activities to FLM, the lack of time and competing priorities leave limited room for satisfying execution of HR practices.[66]

2.2.3. Experienced practices

Experienced practices are the results of the HR practices applied to the employees and how they experience them. The goal is to ensure that the experience is in line with the intended aim of the practice, but deviations are common. A key assumption is that "*HRM practices are viewed by employees as a 'personalized' commitment to them by the organization which is then reciprocated back to the organization by employees through positive attitudes and behaviors".*[67]

Given the critical role that supervisors posses, they are key agents for the organization through which employees form their perception of the organization and its practices.[68] This is confirmed by Guest and Conway, who found that the supervisory leadership is the strongest factor associated to organization commitment.[69] Also Kidd and Smewing support this in their finding that employees who thought that their managers were engaging in feedback and goal setting were more committed

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[62] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Cunningham, I., & Hyman, J. (1995). Transforming the HRM vision into reality: the role of line managers and supervisors in implementing change. *Employee Relations*, 17(8), 5-20.
[65] McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 7(4), 12-29.
[66] Ibid.
[67]Hannah, D., & Iverson, R. (2004). Employment relationships in context: implications for policy and practice. *The employment relationship: Examining psychological and contextual perspectives*, 332-350. p. 339
[68] Liden, R. C., Bauer, T. N., & Erdogan, B. (2004). The role of leader-member exchange in the dynamic relationship between employer and employee: Implications for employee socialization, leaders, and organizations. *The employment relationship: Examining psychological and contextual perspectives*, 226-250
[69] Guest, D., Conway, N., & Dewe, P. (2004). Using sequential tree analysis to search for 'bundles' of HR practices. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 14(1), 79-96.

to the organization.[70] Purcell and Hutchinson have investigated to what extent the FLMs and the HR practice as such impact the experience of the employee, concluding that there is a commonly experienced gap between intended and actual HR practices; and that the employees' experience of practices is closely related to the relationship with the manager and their way of delivering the HR practices.[71]

A number of scholars have investigated the reasons for why experienced practices deviate from the intended practices. The failures can often be explained by FLMs' lack of training, lack of interest, work overload, lack of support, conflicting behavior and self-serving behavior. [72] [73, 74, 75] This verifies that the common challenges among FLMs, described above, has a negative impact on the experience of employees.

2.2.4. Employee attitudes

Employee attitudes describe what attitudes employees hold toward the job and the employer in the term of levels of morale and motivation, job satisfaction and job commitment.[76] This will be described through a review of motivation and job satisfaction theory.

The motivation theory is often split into content theories and process theories. Content theories are based on individual's needs and their relative strength, focusing on *what* motivates. Process theories describe the dynamics between the variables in motivation, focusing on the *process* of motivation.[77]

2.2.4.1. Content theories

In this section, a number of content theories will be presented briefly.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The starting point in Maslow's hierarchy is that human behaviour is contingent upon needs, or needs not yet fulfilled. An unsatisfied need dominates the body, and everything is focused towards satisfying it.[78,79] A satisfied need does not affect a person's behaviour, but as soon as a need has

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[70] Kidd, J. M., & Smewing, C. (2001). The role of the supervisor in career and organizational commitment. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10(1), 25-40.
[71] Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17(1), 3-20.
[72] Fenton-O'Creevy, M. (2001). Employee involvement and the middle manager: saboteur or scapegoat?. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 11(1), 24-40.
[73] McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?
[74] Whittaker, S., & Marchington, M. (2003). Devolving HR responsibility to the line: threat, opportunity or partnership?. *Employee Relations*, 25(3), 245-261.
[75] Kidd, J. M., & Smewing, C. (2001). The role of the supervisor in career and organizational commitment.
[76] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). People management and performance.
[77] Mullins, L. J. (2007). *Management and organisational behaviour*. Pearson Education.
[78] Maslow, Abraham H. (1987): *Motivation and Personality*. Longman & Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers (3 uppl.).

been reasonably fulfilled another need shows up on a higher level, further up in the pyramid. One can therefore say that the needs come in a hierarchical order, which implies that when a need has been satisfied on one level it will trigger needs on the next level, and so forth.[80]

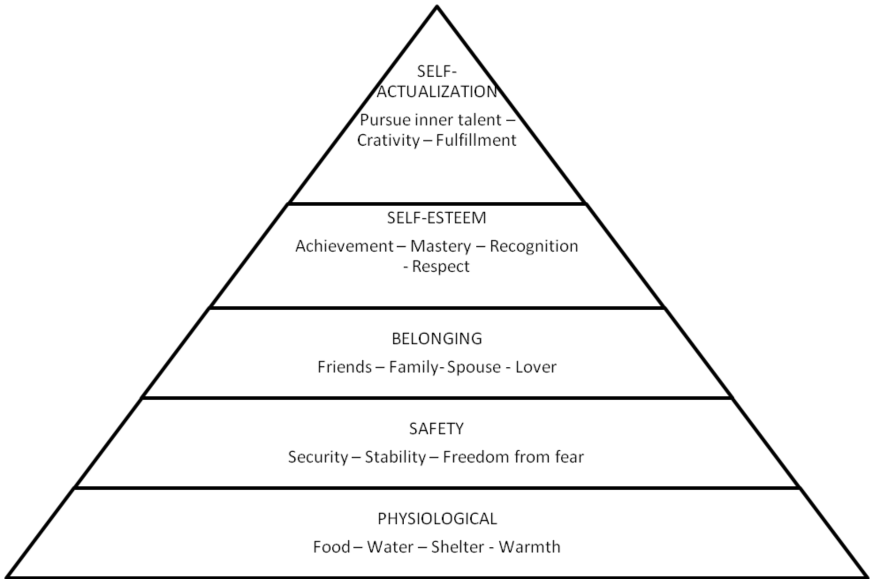

Figure 2 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Herzberg's two-factor model

Herzberg's initial idea was that improved conditions of aspects that make co-workers unsatisfied (for example low salary) would automatically increase the satisfaction level, which would lead to increased results. However, Herzberg found out that satisfaction and dissatisfaction was separated from each other by discrete complex of circumstances. This implied that even if circumstances causing co-workers dissatisfaction were corrected, it was not equivalent of creating satisfaction and motivation.[81, 82] Employees' job satisfaction was first and foremost tied to the nature of the work duties, while dissatisfaction was closely related to work environment and how the personnel were treated. Herzberg therefore decided to divide his theory into two factors. Circumstances enhancing work satisfaction were called motivation factors since they motivate the employee to better performance. Factors related to dissatisfaction were named hygiene factors since they dealt with the working environment. This implies that the motivational factors create satisfaction if present, however, not dissatisfactions if they are missing. For the hygiene factors it is stated that they create dissatisfaction if missing but not satisfaction if present.[83]

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[79] Maslow, Abraham H. (1999): *Toward a Psychology of Being*. John Wiley (3 uppl.).
[80] Maslow, Abraham H. (1987): *Motivation and Personality*.
[81] Herzberg, F. (1966). *Work and the Nature of Man*. Cleveland: World Publishing Company
[82] Herzberg, F. (1971). "An interview with Fredrick Herzberg: Managers or Animal Trainers?" *Management Review*, 60, s. 2-5.
[83] Herzberg, F., B. Mausner & B.B Snyderman (1959/1993). *The Motivation to work*. New York: John Wiley.

Hygiene factors	Motvation factors
The company's staff policies and administrative systems	The character of tasks, that they are challenging, interesting and varying
The leaders' competence and way of leading subordinates	Responsibility and control over the own work situation
Interpersonal relationships between manager and subordinate	Performance and satisfaction related to doing a good job
Working conditions	Recognition
Salary	Promotion
Status	Development
Workplace safety	
Worklife balance	

Figure 3 – Herzberg's two-factor model

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is often mentioned in research within the area of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as activities that occur for the sake of inherent satisfaction or enjoyment and are therefore not dependent on any separable reward or reinforcement. They are spontaneous and done for their own sake, e.g. play, exploration and curiosity-oriented activities.[84,85] It has been demonstrated that the enjoyment of activities that are perceived as intrinsically motivating gets less enjoyable when people starts to get paid for doing them.[86] Extrinsic motivation refers to pursuing an activity because it leads to a separable outcome. The activity itself is thereby not inherently interesting and therefore needs to be stimulated with other means than pure interest.[87]

McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

Closely linked to theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, McGregor's standpoint is that we are defined by our way of thinking, and consequently we have to change our thoughts in order to change our actions. McGregor wanted leaders to reflect upon their perception about the human

[84] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68.
[85] Ryan, R. M., Kuhl, J., & Deci, E. L. (1997). Nature and autonomy: An organizational view of social and neurobiological aspects of self-regulation in behavior and development. *Development and psychopathology*, 9(04), 701-728.
[86] Amabile, T. M. (1996). Creativity in context.
[87] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.

nature in order to show that these perceptions leads to a certain leadership style, resulting in theory X and theory Y.[88]

Theory X is based on the following assumptions of the human nature:[89]

- Humans are by nature lazy and has a reluctance towards work, and if possible would like to avoid working
- Humans are self-centred and indifferent to the organisation's goal as a whole. Consequently, most humans therefore need to be controlled, forced, directed, and threatened with punishments in order to make them endeavour in the best interest of the firm
- The human prefer to be lead, avoid responsibility, is reluctant to change, got no ambition, and prefer above all, security

This leads to the following assumptions about the leader's responsibility:[90]

- The manager is responsible to organize money, material, equipment, and humans in accordance to the economical interests
- The managers are supposed to control and steer the co-workers in a certain direction, control their actions, and adjust their behaviour to make sure it is in line with the need of the organisation
- Without the managers' involvement, the co-workers would remain passive and even oppose the organisation's need. Consequently, the managers are faced with a need to punish, control, persuade, and remunerate the co-workers

McGregor argues that the most commonly used incitement programs that leaders are using are based on Theory X, which he suggests counteracts its initial intentions. So management who leads by Theory X runs risk that the employee will look upon work as a form of punishment they need to perform in order to get satisfaction outside of work.[91]

Theory Y relies on different assumptions of the human nature compared to Theory X:[92]

- Humans have no intrinsic reluctance towards work
- External control is not the only way an organisation can go about in order to get the employees to act and perform in the interest of the firm.
- Humans do not only accept, but seeks responsibility
- The ability to show a high degree of fantasy, curiosity, and creativity in the solution-process of an organisational problem is a common state of mind
- The human's potential intellect is only used to a limited degree

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[88] Heil, Gary, Warren Bennis & Deborah C. Stephens (2000): *Douglas McGregor, Revisited: Managing the Human Side of the Enterprise.* John Wiley.

[89] McGregor, Douglas (2006): *The Human Side of Enterprise*. Annotated Edition. McGraw-Hill.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

The most important task as a leader is therefore to create the conditions necessary for the employees to reach their potential and goals by adapting their actions according to the goal of the organisation. Humans are not supposed to be motivated, instead an environment should be created where motivated people can contribute as much as possible, by being self-motivated. Furthermore, in order to create congruence between the employees' goals and the organisational goals it is important to align (to the highest degree possible) the two. By doing so the organisation creates a platform on which the employees can reach their goals within the organisation's framework.[93]

Self-determination theory

The self-determination theory, developed by Ryan and Deci, focuses on *"(…) people's growth tendencies and innate psychological need as a basis for self-motivation and personality integration, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes"*.[94] The theory is based on the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; and how self-regulation of extrinsic motivation leads to internalization of external regulations to be congruent with one's values and needs. By visualizing this process as a continuum ranging from amotivation; to extrinsic motivation; to intrinsic motivation, the level of self-determination of a certain behavior is explained.

Behavior	Nonself-Determined					Self-Determinded
Motivation	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation				Intrinsic Motivation
Regulatory styles	Non-Regulation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation
Perceived Locus of Control	Impersonal	External	Somewhat External	Somewhat Internal	Internal	Internal
Relevance Regulatory Processes	Nonintentional, Nonvaluing, Incompetence, Lack of Control	Compliance, External Rewards and Punishments	Self-control Ego-Involvement Internal Rewards and Punishments	Personal Importance, Conscious Valuing	Congruence, Awareness, Synthesis With Self	Interest, Enjoyment, Inherent Satisfaction

Figure 4 – Deci & Ryan's Self-determination Theory

By making this distinction in relative autonomy between the different levels of extrinsic motivation, a more nuanced picture of extrinsic motivation appears – as opposed to the more traditional view where extrinsic motivation mostly has been equaled to *external regulation* as presented in the model.[95]

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being..

[95] Ibid.

The authors stress three key dimensions that can be found in commitment and authenticity in intrinsic motivation and integrated extrinsic motivation: need for competence; relatedness; and autonomy. When satisfied, these three factors enhance self-motivation and mental health, but diminishes motivation and well-being when absent.[96]

2.2.4.2. Process theories

In this section, a number of process theories will be presented briefly.

Hackman and Oldham's work design theory

The key feature of the theory is that an employee's motivation is dependent on the fit between the employee and the job he or she is supposed to perform.[97] A good fit between the employee and the job leads to high intrinsic motivation for the employee, which translates into a positive effect/ result for the organisation. A good fit also implies that the top management have to use little resources in the task of motivate and satisfy its employees. The key for the top management will therefore be to create or redesign the work in a way that maximizes the fit between the employee and the task.[98]

Hackman and Oldham argue that management through breaking down tasks into small and efficient sub-processes only provides an illusion of efficiency since it in the long run leads to demotivation among the employees and consequently poor long term results.[99] The authors state that the advocates of the classical motivational theory makes one big mistake in their assumptions, and that is to assume the employees with the right managerial control will be more efficient if they work with simplified routine functions, which can be illustrated through e.g. the Hawthorne-experiment.[100]

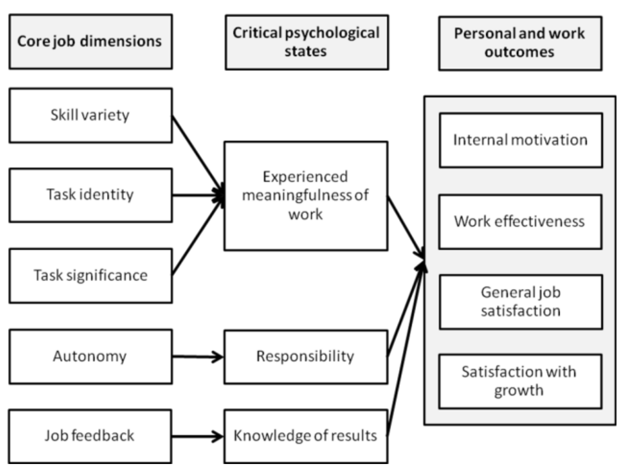

Figure 5 – Hackman & Oldham's Work Design Theory

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[96] Ibid.
[97] Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1980). Work redesign
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

Instead, Hackman and Oldham talk about the importance of increasing the intrinsic motivation and points out three main factors: [101]

- The employee must perceive the work as meaningful
- Give autonomy and responsibility for the result
- Transparency, the employee needs to know whether his or her performance is good or bad

Vroom's expectancy theory

In his model, Vroom used a mathematical formula to illustrate the dimensions and their interrelation, resulting in:

*Valence * Expectancy = Motivation*

The theory is based on people's preferences for a certain outcome and her expectations on to what extent an action leads to desired result.[102]

Valence is described as the anticipated satisfaction from an outcome. The valence is differentiated from value, which refers to the actual satisfaction from the outcome, while valence refers to the expected value of an outcome. *Expectancy* refers to the relationship between actions and result, and the probability that the particular action will lead to the desired result. By combining the two concepts, the equation states that motivation is a product of the valence of the outcome; and the strength of the expectancy that action will lead to desired results.[103]

2.2.5. Employee behavior

Employee behavior is the concrete actions taken, based on the attitudinal dimensions.[104] Researchers such as Applbaum et al. and MacDuffie stress the importance of HR practices in encouraging employees in doing the job as good as possible, both from an individual and a group perspective.[105,106] Employees sometimes go outside what is expected and taking responsibility of things they are not formally obliged to. This is among scholars referred to as *discretionary behavior.* The concept is based on the idea that employees have a certain degree of choice and discretion on how to perform the tasks and responsibilities assigned to them.[107] The similar topic Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) refers to how employees perceive their employer, the level of satisfaction in their job and how motivated they feel.[108]

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Vroom, V. H. (1964). Work and motivation.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). People management and performance.
[105] Appelbaum, E. (Ed.). (2000). *Manufacturing advantage: Why high-performance work systems pay off*. Cornell University Press.
[106] MacDuffie, J. P. (1995). Human resource bundles and manufacturing performance: Organizational logic and flexible production systems in the world auto industry. *Industrial and labor relations review*, 197-221.
[107] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*.
[108] Coyle-Shapiro, J. A. M., Kessler, I., & Purcell, J. (2004). Exploring Organizationally Directed Citizenship Behaviour: Reciprocity or 'It's my Job'?. *Journal of management studies*, *41*(1), 85-106.

In their model, Purcell et al. have chosen to highlight three main antecedents to discretionary behavior: psychological contract, leader-member exchange theory and perceived organizational support[109]:

2.2.5.1 Psychological contracts

The concept of psychological contracts was defined by Schein in 1978 as: *"set of unwritten reciprocal expectations between an individual employee and the organization",* aiming to stress how the matching of needs of the employee and the organization was essential for company success.[110] Grant defines the concept as *"perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship, organization and individual of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship"*.[111] The psychological contract brings attention to the reciprocal relation between manager and subordinate, requiring interaction between the two.[112]

2.2.5.2. Leader-member exchange theory

Based on social exchange theory, the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) refers to the relationship between manager and subordinate and that the manager has different relationships with different subordinates.[113] The exchange can be described as a reciprocal process where the manager offers e.g. power, influence, and access to resources; in exchange for loyalty, effort and increased workload from the subordinate. According to Wayne et al., this has a positive effect on job performance, as employees tend to perform required job activities well in exchange for benefits provided by the manager.[114] Uhl-Bien et al. argue that effectively developed relationships between leader and subordinate have a positive impact on task performance.[115]

2.2.5.3. Perceived organizational support

In addition to the relationship between employee and manager, the perceived organizational support (POS) refers to the employee's relation with the rest of the organization. The concepts LMX and POS have similarities, but Wayne et al. concluded that they have different antecedents and consequences, why they should be treated separately.[116] Kamdar and Van Dyne studied how LMX

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[109] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*

[110] Schein, E. H., & Schein, E. (1978). *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs* (Vol. 24). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

[111] Grant, D. (1999). HRM, rhetoric and the psychological contract: a case of'easier said than done'. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 10(2), 327-350.

[112] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*

[113] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*

[114] Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective. *Academy of Management journal*, *40*(1), 82-111.

[115] Uhl-Bien, M., Graen, G. B., & Scandura, T. A. (2000). Implications of leader-member exchange (LMX) for strategic human resource management systems: Relationships as social capital for competitive advantage. *Research in personnel and human resources management*, 18, 137-186.

[116] Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective.

and team-member exchange (TMX) affected task performance and OCB, finding that good quality social exchange relationships is positively related to task performance and OCB.[117] According to Wayne et al., employees who have participated in formal and informal training and development exercises report higher levels of POS. Unlike LMX, POS does not directly contribute to business performance. [118]

2.2.6. Performance outcomes

Performance outcomes show the practical implications of a certain set of behaviors. Time window and type of performance can vary from more abstract and long-term to more short-term, precise measures of performance such as financial and economical impact.[119, 120]

2.3. Theoretical framework

Given the identified gap in research on employee's experience from implementation of the HR practice of assessment tools and the associated effects, a theoretical framework will be developed to allow an in-depth analysis of the subject. Existing research on usage of personality assessment tools will be integrated with Purcell et al.'s generic model on the link between HRM practices and performance to further describe the practical usage of assessment tools for development purposes. When integrating the more specific theory on assessment tools with the more generic framework by Purcell et al., some adaptations are required due to the model's linear approach and thereby limited possibilities for iterations. In order to allow for further analysis, the integration of assessment tool theory has resulted in two extensions to the model: (1) Employee preferences and; (2) Adapted behavior, illustrated in figure 6 and described below.

[117] Kamdar, D., & Van Dyne, L. (2007). The joint effects of personality and workplace social exchange relationships in predicting task performance and citizenship performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *92*(5), 1286.
[118] Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective.
[119] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). *People management and performance*.
[120] Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence.

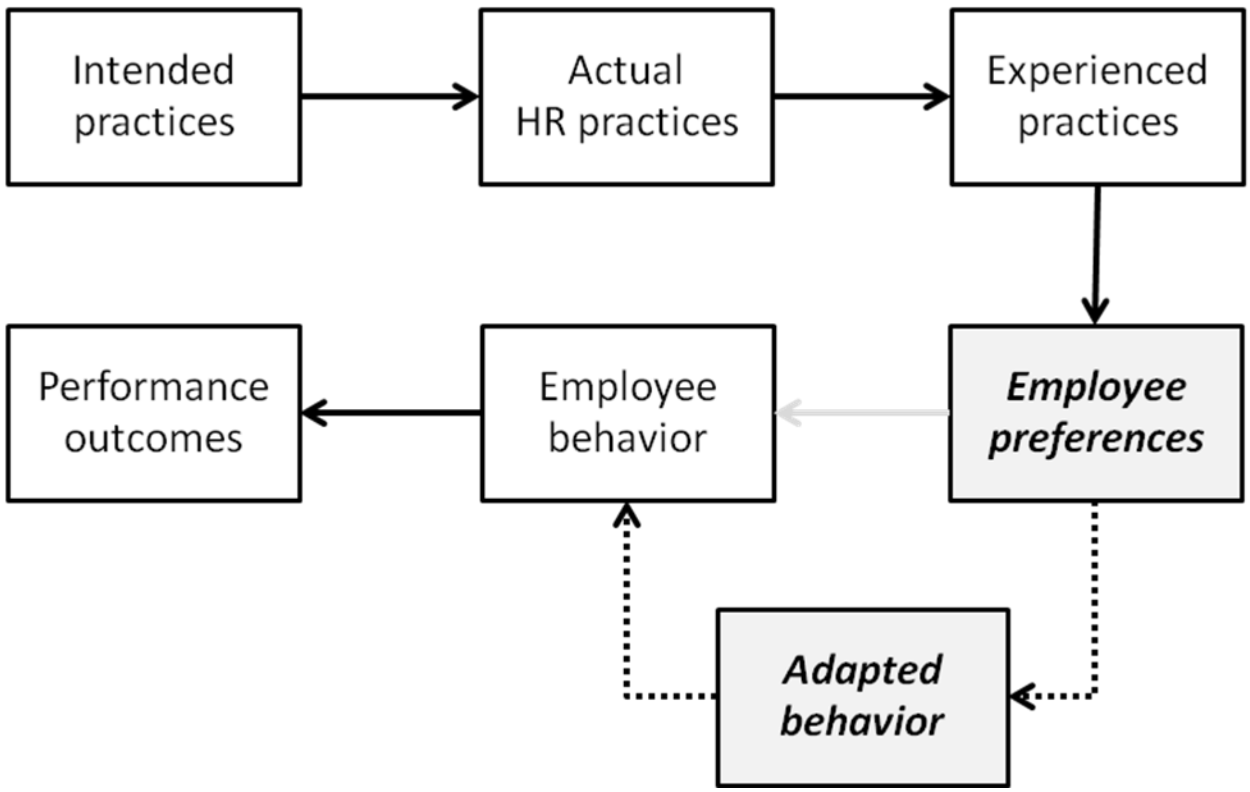

Figure 6 – Initial theoretical framework

2.3.1. Employee preferences

Given the inherent purpose of assessment tools, namely to measure characteristics that pertain to behavior[121]; and the increase of self-awareness[122], the model can be extended to not only include employee attitudes as a result of applying HR practices as such, but also the *awareness* of one's individual and others' attitudes and preferences. By using the notation *employee preferences* rather than attitudes, this captures the attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation and job commitment as well as the awareness of the drivers for these concepts. In order to concretize the motivation theories presented above, two classifications of employee preferences are discussed: *work design* and *rewards*. Work design refers to the way the work is structured in terms of type of tasks assigned, degree of autonomy, preferred ways of working and optimal communication style. The concepts of intrinsic motivation, theory Y and the theory of Hackman & Oldham all stress the importance of the individual's drivers and areas of interests. Rewards are referring to the desired outcomes associated with certain performance. In this case, extrinsic motivation, theory X, Vroom's expectancy theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs are more applicable as they to a higher extent stress the valence of a desired outcome rather than the journey to get there. The two types of preferences can be seen from the perspective of self-determination theory, where an intrinsically motivating work design and more extrinsically motivating rewards can be used.

[121] Kaplan, R., & Saccuzzo, D. (2008). *Psychological testing: Principles, applications, and issues*. p 6
[122] Sjöberg, L. (2000). Personlighetstest i arbetslivet: Historik och aktuell forskning.

2.3.2. Degree of adaptation

When discussing behavioral outcomes, Purcell et al. are mainly focusing on discretionary behavior and OCB as an outcome of attitudinal outcomes from the experience of HR practice. Compared with the concept of employee engagement outlined earlier in the thesis, discretionary behavior and OCB do to a high degree treat common dimensions. The dependent concepts of psychological contracts, leader-member exchange theory and perceived organizational support, show how an improved match between the employee's preferences and what the company offers enhances discretionary behavior, OCB and employee engagement. This reasoning is also supported by some of the motivation theories, e.g. McGregor and Hackman & Oldham. For that reason, we would like to introduce the concept *adapted behavior*, referring to the consciously chosen workplace behavior by colleagues, managers and the extended organization; aiming for an increased workplace alignment with expressed employee preferences. This leads to increased levels of discretionary behavior and OCB, or as from now on referred to: employee engagement. The reasoning builds on the assumption that employee preferences are constant while adapted behavior is changeable. The chance to increase employee engagement is thereby solely dependent on how the adapted behavior is handled in relation to employee preferences.

2.3.3. Presentation of theoretical framework

Based on the suggested extensions to Purcell et al.'s model, a new, updated version is illustrated below. The model will be used to answer the outlined research questions in the following way: (1) Intended practices, actual practices and experienced practices will be used to describe the intentions; the practical implementation; and the experience of the formal assessment process. (2) The effects from participating in the formal assessment process described through (2a) the level of awareness of employee preferences for work design and rewards and; (2b) the potential adaptation of behavior related to identified preferences. (3) Changes in employee engagement as a result of improved psychological contracts, LMX and POS, and thereby associated performance outcomes. This part will however be partly disregarded in the further analysis.

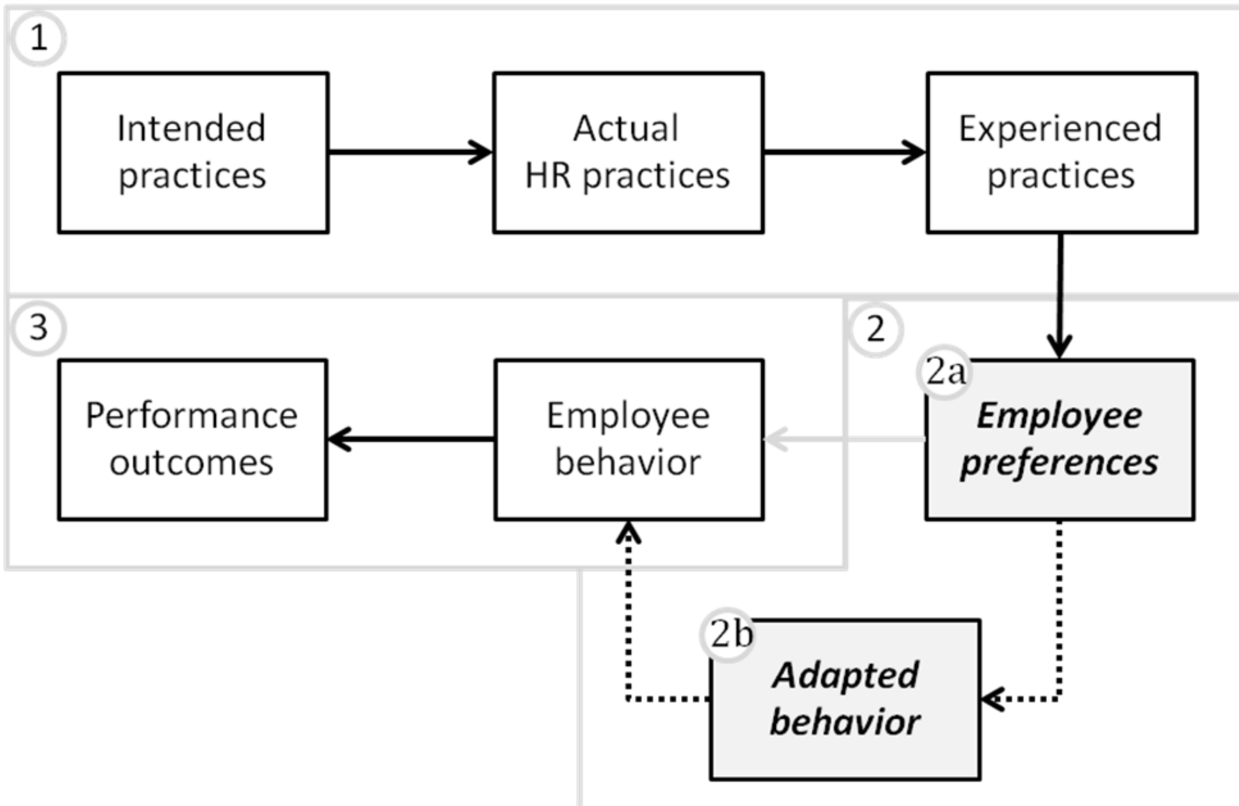

Figure 7–Final theoretical framework

3. Methodology

In this chapter the aim is to clarify the methods used and choices made in the conduction of this thesis. Explanations of the data gathering, case companies, and interviews will be elaborated upon. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on the limitations of the study as well as the reliability and validity.

3.1. Research Design

Regarding the methods used in the conduction of a thesis, two main methods can be identified: a quantitative and a qualitative approach.[123] If a clear hypothesis can be formulated or if a well-structured problem can be recognised, a quantitative method can often be the choice of use.[124] The qualitative method is instead often based on great depth of a current issue and of less standardization, together with greater openness and flexibility compared to a quantitative method.[125] When comparing our research question, which is centred on employees' experiences, with the methodological choices available we found the qualitative approach to be the most appropriate and consequently the chosen one for the conduction of the thesis.

After deciding the methodological approach, our next step was to thoroughly go through existing theories and to make a comprehensive review on different secondary sources regarding the subject of employee engagement, assessment tests, and motivation. Based on our findings from the review we manage to identify gaps in the theories regarding employees' and organizations' experience of assessment tests and how they are used in the everyday operations. Based on the identified gaps in the subject, or literature in the area being incipient, we also found research justifying our choice of using a qualitative research design.[126]

Since our research question aims to observe effects on employee engagement, experienced by managers and employees, research supports an in-depth interview study to be an appropriate method of choice.[127] In the creation of the thesis much confidence and faith have been put in the outcome of qualitative and in-depth interviews. However, before the interview process began, we took a standpoint in the theories and models found during the review of previous research. The theories and models were then used as a foundation when gathering and analysing the data. Hence, the approach used in the thesis can be described as explorative and abductive. [128]

[123] Patel, R. & Davidson, B. (2003). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder - Att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning*
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Edmondson, A. C., & McManus, S. E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of management review*, 32(4), 1246-1264.
[127] Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Vol. 5). sage.
[128]Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2008) *Tolkning och Reflektion – Vetenskapsfilosofi och Kvalitativ Metod*. Denmark, Studentlitteratur

The most prominent model used in the creation of this thesis was the HR causal chain model created by Purcell et al., presented in the theory and theoretical framework. When deciding on our theoretical framework we took a standpoint in Purcell et al.'s original model revised the model in order to create a more appropriate fit when applied to assessment tests. When integrating our reversed Purcell et al. model with the assessment tests we saw that a separation between the assessment process and the assessment effects could naturally be done.

Our idea was that the process of the assessment test, which includes the intentions of the test, how it was carried out, and how it was experienced, could be related to the upper three boxes in the model. While we on the other hand found that the lower level of the model, box four, could be related to the outcome and usage of the actual test result.

In order to adequately gather and analyze data we have therefore throughout this thesis tried to separate the assessment process from assessment outcome in order to ease the analysis and to create a desirable structure. The interview questionnaire used as the platform for the data gathering have consequently also been separated and labelled in accordance to the mentioned structure.

3.2. Case selection

The main criterion for the interview selection was that an assessment test had been conducted within the last 6 – 36 months. Since we were interested in people's experience and attitudes to the tests as well as how the companies and project groups had worked with the tests and the test results, our idea was that the above mentioned time frame would be close enough to still be fresh in mind while also be long enough to provide the case-companies with time to have worked with the result and for us to evaluate the outcome of their actions. Since the usage of assessment tests for developmental purposes (at companies) is not an established procedure but rather an emerging activity, it has been somewhat difficult to get hold of collaboration partners. Both because the number of alternatives is limited as well as the information from the tests are often regarded as sensitive information and companies are therefore reluctant to share it. However, in this study we have managed to include two case-companies as the primary generator of data. The two companies are both large and multinational and both of them are listed on the New York stock exchange, however, they are active in two different industries and different when it comes to their business and value propositions. The rationale for using large companies has therefore to do with both accessibility and relevance.

Within the two case-companies we decided that small project groups consisting of both manager and subordinates that have gone through at least one assessment test-process would be the most preferable constellation for us to study, since the implementation is dependent on both managers' enactment and effects on employees. Another reason would be that with a small project group we would get a tight, coherent group consisting of people with- and without formal power. Also, the group members have worked close together, which implies that the probability of using the assessment tools actively in their day-to-day operations is considered higher compared with randomly chosen individuals at different positions in a company. In the case companies studied we have been able to collaborate with four different project groups, one project group from one company and three project groups from the other company.

Our idea was to look across the various teams in order to compare, analyze and discuss the findings from the teams and to spot potential similarities and differences in their approaches and experiences.

Company	**X**			**Y**
Team	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**
Interviewees				
Managers	MA	MB	MC	MD
Subordinates	SA1	SB1	SC1	SD1
	SA2	SB2	SC2	SD2
	SA3		SC3	SD3
	SA4			
	SA5			
HR	HRX			HRY
Coach				PY

Figure 8–Interview overview

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Our primary sources in this study have been interviews. In total, 24 interviews were conducted where 20 relate to the case-study companies and 4 of the interviews were conducted with test providers and consultants in order to get a wider picture of the subject of assessment tools. In addition to interviewing the manager and subordinates, HR representatives have also given their view of the company's use of assessment tools. The interviews related to the case study have been done in a qualitative way with a semi-structured format.[129] This implies a question battery (the question battery used can be found in the appendix as well as a translated copy) have been used in the interview process where the questions have been open enough to provide the respondent with freedom when answering, but still cover the relevant areas.[130, 131] A high-level version of the question-battery used in the interviews was sent to the interviewee beforehand in order to provide the respondent with time to prepare for the interview and also to minimize the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations during the actual interview. The absolute majority of the case-study interviews were face-to-face interviews of an average length of approximately 60 minutes. This was achievable since we interviewed employees from the case-company's Swedish

[129] Patel, R. och Davidson, B.(2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder.*
[130] Ibid.
[131] Kvale, S., & Torhell, S. E. (1997). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. Studentlitteratur.

branches, which both are located in the Stockholm region. All the face-to-face interviews were also recorded in order to improve the accuracy[132], and afterwards semi-transcribed.

Since all the respondents have been Swedish speaking, the interviews have for convenience purposes been held in Swedish. The respondents have felt more confident in using their mother tongue and for the creation of this thesis we have not been able to identify any shortcomings of the applied interview method. Instead, benefits can be seen since we avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and potential language barriers. However, since solely Swedish have been used in the interviews the quotes appearing in the thesis has therefore originally been stated in Swedish and then translated into English by the writers.

Our research is to a large extent built on interviews and the respondents' willingness to provide us with information. Since there might exist reluctance, especially from the employees to answer questions about their executive colleagues, we have kept the interviews strictly confidential. By that procedure we believe we will get better cooperation and more truthful answers.[133] We have also, to the extent possible, tried to inform the respondent of the importance of their participation as well as highlighted what the interviews can offer them in order to motivate the respondent. The willingness to participate and engage in the interview session can otherwise be an obstacle due to a laissez-faire mentality or a lack of interest.[134]

The empirical material has, after all the interviews were conducted, been analyzed with a standpoint in our theoretical framework. The different transcripts from the interviews were initially analyzed and compared based on the divisions made in the framework. Primarily we tried to ensure an intra-team consistency in the perceived experience of the assessment process between the different team members. This was then followed up with a comparison between the intended assessment test process and the experienced one. After analysing the intra-team we then turned our eyes towards the inter-team and made comparisons between our four different project groups. We wanted to see if we could identify common denominators and discrepancies between the teams. After the team comparisons, we started to look at our respondents on an individual basis in order to see if we could identify individually related aspects impacting the experience of assessment tests too.

3.4. Limitations

In the introduction of this thesis, the concept of employee engagement was introduced. As stated, in the introduction of the thesis we have chosen to use the concept in broad terms. The rationale would be that when interviewing, we cannot expect our case-study respondents to know or take into consideration the differences of these terms since they are similar and closely related. Furthermore, we are not interested in studying respondent's potential knowledge in the area, rather we look at the practical usage of assessment test from a more general perspective, and to

[132] Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research:* design and methods. 2nd.
[133] Patel, R. och Davidson, B.(2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder.*
[134] Ibid.

distinguish between the similar yet different concepts would significantly complicate the data gathering, analysis as well as the thesis comprehension.

Due to limitations in time and scope, but also challenges in finding case companies, we have chosen to only include two companies in our case study. This has been done in order to get the necessary depth and insight in the project groups interviewed. In addition, the thesis will solely focus on describing and analysing the formal assessment process, experienced effects and the how it impacts employee engagement. We will thereby not investigate to what extent employee engagement potentially changes, but only how. The reason for not measuring this is mainly related to limitations in time and scope, but also the difficulties in accessing data and finding valid measures. Instead, we will focus on in what way employee engagement is impacted by the usage of assessment tools.

Both companies are large American multinationals, which implies a possibility of both cultural and size similarities in our selection samples. As we only study two companies with similar background and due to the time constraints, the cultural aspect of Purcell et al.'s model has been left out in the analysis.

3.5. Reliability and validity

The ensuring of reliability and validity are equally important in the quantitative as in the qualitative research. However the way to ensure it differs between the different research approaches.[135] Reliability often refers to the correlation (or ability) for a test to show equal results on repeated occasions and independent of who carries out the test. Validity refers to the level of how well a measurement or a concept originates and corresponds accurately to reality, or in other words, how well your measurement tool measures what it claims to measure.[136] However, in a qualitative study the two terms reliability and validity are often intertwined.[137] In a qualitative study the two terms get a broader meaning and can therefore be said to include the whole research process.[138]

Personal interpretations are impossible to eliminate in a qualitative research. However, by being two persons present at the majority of interviews, as well as recording the face-to-face interviews we believe we have manage to reduce the risk of misinterpretations and increase the level of reliability and validity in the study. Nevertheless, research states that the data gathered and interpreted by the writers could have been interpreted differently by others.[139] Being two persons at the interviews have enhanced the creative potential, which is also supportable by theories,[140] as well as it has been helpful in discussing and clarifying findings afterwards, which we believed had positive consequences for the relevance and validity.

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[135] Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business Research Methods 3e*. Oxford university press.
[136] Trochim, W.M. & Donnelly, J.P. 2008, Research methods knowledge base, Atomic Dog/Cengage Learning Mason, OH.
[137] Patel, R. och Davidson, B.(2011). *Forskningsmetodikens grunder.*
[138] Ibid.
[139] Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. SAGE Publications Limited.
[140] Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research:* design and methods. 2nd.

4. Empirics

The empirics have been structured in sections describing the four separate teams individually. Each case description is divided into two sections: First, the implementation and experience of the assessment process will be described. Second, the experienced effects from the process will be explained.

4.1 Team A

The observed project group consisted of team leaders at the customer service function, taking the test during spring 2012.

4.1.1. The assessment process

The assessment test was taken as a part of a training initiative with the purpose to improve coaching skills. The manager of the team was the initiator of the training, and it was thereby not a standardized training offered by the organization. The team used an external consultant with certification in Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)[141] who also had extensive experience from both leadership development and development of coaching skills.

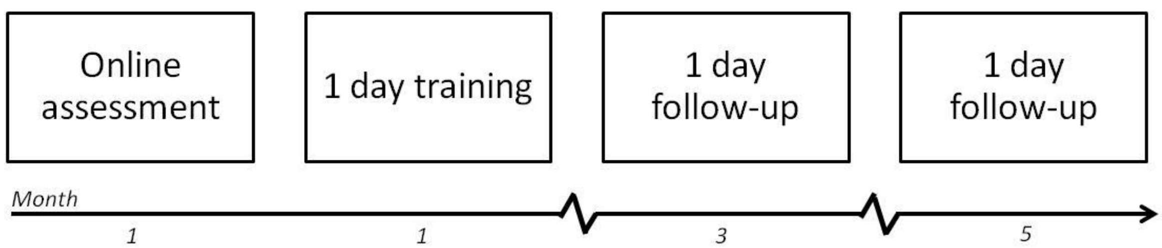


Figure 9 – Team A's assessment process

"I initiated the training since I wanted to improve the self-awareness among the employees, to make them reflect upon themselves as individuals and to reflect upon their co-workers. By gaining knowledge and to share it among each other at the office the purpose was to create a better work environment and better performance." –Manager A

A group of 8 team leaders and their manager participated in the training which consisted of an introductory full-day training with two follow-up sessions. Before the first session, the participants were asked to do an online personality assessment. The results from the test were used during the first training day where the group got to discuss their different profiles, compare the results and explain their reasoning in certain situations. The coach was present the whole time and facilitated the discussions. In addition, she held detailed presentations of the four dimensions in the profiling

[141] **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)** –In the MBTI assessment tool, Jung's theories have been extrapolated in order to create a psychometric questionnaire designed for measuring psychological preferences in four dimensions: extraversion/introversion, intuition/sensation, feeling/thinking and judging/perceiving. By combining the dimensions, the test taker ends up in one of 16 profile combinations.

and exemplified how different profiles typically act in certain situations. Another important part of the education was learning how to identify traits of the different profiles and to be able to categorize people quickly by asking the right questions. In the follow-up sessions they discussed experiences from applying the new knowledge in a practical setting and how to develop their skills further.

All the respondents claim that the group discussions were the most value-adding part of the assessment process. They felt that they had a chance to explain themselves and why they act in certain ways, but most importantly, got to know more about their colleagues and better understand their actions and preferences. They appreciated the discussions with the team as well as the input from the external coach, who in a pedagogical manner could explain the personality traits of different profiles.

All interviewees felt comfortable sharing the results with each other since the environment felt safe and the benefit from the discussions outweighed the discomfort that could be associated with discussing one's personality.

In the process of interpreting and understanding the result, the external coach educated in the subject was a great resource. The use of external knowledge in the matter was well received among the respondents who got results explained and questions answered in a safe environment. Several respondents have also explained external expertise as a necessity since the consultant possessed capabilities superior to the knowledge available internally.

Between the first training session and the follow-up sessions, the team had many and long dialogues about their learnings, but did not have it in a structured format. The manager did not have any formal discussions with her subordinates. Instead, her mindset was to incorporate the discussions of the test with the ordinary coaching sessions in order to embed the activity in the every-day work.

The overall experience from the assessment process was positive even though a few issues were brought up. The most stressed issue related to the interpretation of questions regarding roles, which was experienced as particularly tricky and was a pervading concern among the respondents.

"Neither the information prior to the test nor the test itself gave a good explanation of how to handle the role issue. Should I answer from a pure work-perspective, private perspective or a general perspective? Also, should I answer how I think I am, how I think others perceive me, or how I would like to be?" – Subordinate A1

4.1.2. Effects

Several respondents have praised the assessment test as an enabler of dialogue and to share information about oneself. When receiving the test results the respondents have stated it felt both inspiring and interesting since the reports have made something abstract become more tangible. The results were well received by all participants, even if the individual learning's differed between the respondents. Some saw the report as a confirmation of what they already knew, while others gained some new insights. Moreover, the interviewees especially appreciated the opportunity to get to know more about other profiles' reasoning, how to identify them with a few questions and most importantly how to approach them in order to ensure a good communication and reducing the risk of conflicts.

"You know that all people are different and think and act different (…) but when you read it in a document it becomes more tangible in a way" – Subordinate A3

Even though all the respondents have questioned a few things in the test result, they have nevertheless stated that the overall result correlates well with their personalities. Several respondents have used the information they have gained to make personal changes in the peer-to-peer relations, both in communication and task-completion.

"Based on the findings from the test I have changed my behaviour to my colleagues. (…) I am a person who does things in the last minute and the deadline is often my motivator. When I read my colleagues profiles and during group discussions I realized my behaviour made other people stressed (…) therefore, when we work in project groups, I sometimes complete my tasks earlier nowadays. And in case I still do the job my old way, close to deadline, I do not tell my colleagues about it. Instead, if they ask, I use to tell them I am done with my task so they do not need to worry". – Subordinate A2

The assessment tests has turned out to be a good tool in the "get to know" process with new colleagues since it provides a quick guide or a shortcut to a person's personality and preferences. Respondents believe it can be beneficial to know the other participants traits in order to know how to approach them in the best way.

"When a meeting goes sour I always analyze it afterwards, sometimes alone but sometimes with my team. (…) I often analyze the persons that participated in the meeting in terms of the letter combinations from the training. (…) For example I can tell the team we should have remembered he is a typical T-person and not have become so impatient" – Subordinate A1

"We are now entering a meeting with many I-persons so remember to give them space in order to get their opinions" – Subordinate A4

In addition to the increased understanding of the individual preferences, respondents have also stated other positive aspect of the assessment test to be the ability to understand each other on a deeper level and the ability to talk the same language. Misunderstandings and irritation have decreased, which they opine is especially visible when they work with persons outside their ordinary team who has not conducted an assessment test yet.

"When we work with people from other teams and people we not normally work with we realize how far our team has come and how good the assessment test really is for improved communication and understanding." – Subordinate A3

The manager of the team was a great advocator of the assessment test and a strong believer of the potential benefits. The team members pointed out her passion for the tool and how she managed to incorporate the usage in the day-to-day work as a main reason for the increased usage among the subordinates as well.

"Taking the test was a life changing experience. It might sound like a strong statement, but I use the new knowledge I gained every day" – Subordinate A1

According to the manager, she uses the results from the tests actively on a daily basis.

"When I assign my subordinates certain tasks or projects, I consider their profiles. For example, I make sure to combine 'feeling' and 'thinking' individuals when working with sensitive staff issues. (...) Since I know that my subordinates have different motivation factors, I try to adapt how I recognize and reward them." – Manager A

4.2 Team B

Team B consists of a number of analysts that conducted the assessment during fall 2011.

4.2.1. The assessment process

The team got the opportunity to do a DiSC assessment[142] as the company's HR manager was certified in the tool and informed the other managers in the company that she was willing to let the employees take the test. Manager B thought it was a good idea and that it probably could be beneficial for the team members as well as the team as a whole.

"I did not have a clear thought with letting my subordinates take the test, I just thought that it was a good opportunity for my team to get to know more about themselves." - Manager B

The team members were sent a link to the online assessment, conducted the test and then got a report sent to them by mail. After reading the test reports, the team members had an individual follow-up meeting with the manager where they went through the report and discussed the different dimensions of the test. The discussions with the manager were perceived as a good opportunity to explain one's profile and have discussions on challenges and common problems. As one of the interviewees was fairly new in his role, he saw the discussion as an efficient way of getting his manager to get to know more about him. The discussion did also deepen the understanding for the manager's profile as he shared his report with the subordinate.

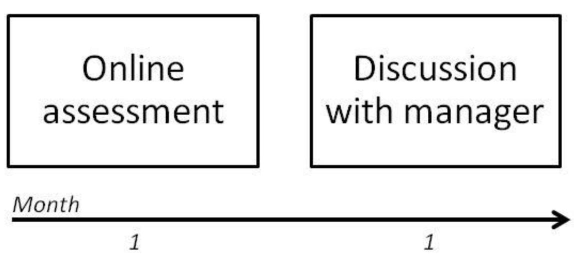


Figure 10 – Team B's assessment process

[142] **Disc** – Is an assessment tool used for development purposes and aimed to improve the individual's ability to better understand herself and others. The test provides a guideline of how to improve interpersonal communication in order to create efficiency. Furthermore, how to connect to your co-workers in an easier way and how you can improve interactions with others.

Team B did not have group discussions regarding the results, and none of the interviewees felt a need for having it either. Although they could see the positive effects of having group discussions in general, they did not think that the team would benefit much from it due to the profiles of the team members.

The subordinates believe that they did not receive very much information about the test, even if they could see the purpose of doing it. The manager knew this was the case, but justified his lack of information sharing with an indifferent attitude towards the assessment test in general. Luckily, the assessment went well, but one of the interviewed test providers gave an example of an unsuccessful implementation:

"I know about an industrial company that wanted to conduct personality tests on the operational workforce. Due to poor communication about the purpose of the assessment, the workforce protested and refused to take the test as they suspected that the results would be used against them in a potential layoff. The union had to be involved, leading to that the assessments did not take place at all." – Test provider 2

4.2.2. Effects

The interviewees believe that the test results to the greater extent were a verification of what they already knew. Even if the interviewees got a few new insights, getting the physical report with precise formulations was perceived as the most rewarding outcome.

"It was great getting the profile in written form. It really helped in the conversation with [Manager B] since we could go through it part by part and discuss different aspects of my personality" – Subordinate B1

"We all know quite well how we are as persons, what motivates us (…) but to get a ten page report explaining your personality on a deeper level, where you get hands-on knowledge how to handle people that are different to you is valuable.(…) To get an objective view of your strengths and weaknesses is interesting and rewarding for you professionally but it is also beneficial for your life in general." – Subordinate B2

"Money does not really motivate me (…) flexibility, autonomy and to have a job that I like is what matters to me (…) it was verified in the test result" – Subordinate B1

By having discussions with the manager, but also reading the report, the interviewees claim that they gained a deeper understanding for people's differences. Even if they had understood it on a rational level before, reading about their own profile and compare it to others' improved their understanding for how people tend to think and act in certain situations.

There has been a fear among the respondents that the use of the assessment could have a locking in effect. This fear was also shared by team A, and thought to be stronger when using assessment tools in early phases of an employment. In such a case there has been a fear from the new employee to be "locked in" in a certain profile were the assessment result ends up as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In addition, they saw a potential problem in taking the report to literally, and judge others.

"There is always a risk that people only see the profile and not the individual and say things like: 'Since you are this profile, you are like this and this'. That is very frustrating." Subordinate B1

The interviewees claim that they have made a few changes on the basis of the test results. For example, one interviewee is actively thinking about being more action oriented when needed, instead of being too analytical and detail oriented which is his underlying profile. In addition, they describe how they have used the different profiles to describe each other, often in a humorous way.

"When someone in the team acts in a way that is closely related to his profile, we can sometimes joke about it, saying things like: 'Now you were very blue[143]' " – Subordinate B1

According to the manager, he has tried to make some adaptations on the basis of his subordinates, even if he sees limitations in the opportunities of doing it.

"A role is always what it is, some things are impossible to adapt to. If you are an analyst, you have to like working with data. The role is what it is, you have to take it for what it is. I think it is sometimes better to change role than make the adaptation necessary" Manager B

4.3 Team C

Like team B, the manager of team C was offered the opportunity to do a DiSC assessment, supported by the HR manager. The assessment took place during autumn 2011.

4.3.1. The assessment process

"I had worked with both DiSC and other assessment tools previously and could really see the benefit from using it. Especially in our team, where everyone was working on their own and the need for an increased team feeling was evident, I wanted to use the assessment as a starting point for developing the team as a whole, but foremost the individuals within it." – Manager C

Like the other teams, the assessment was conducted online. After finishing the assessment, the test report was sent to the participants by mail. A couple of days after the assessments, the team had an off-site planning day where three hours were devoted to the reports from the test. The HR manager participated during this session and explained the different parts of the test and facilitated discussions around different profiles and how to treat the team members on the basis of their preferences. For this, she used a chart that pointed out the different profiles in the team. About a year later, two team members initiated a follow-up where the team once again discussed the results from the assessment, mainly with the purpose to try to profile employees from other teams. Apart from this session, no follow up activities took place after the assessment.

[143] Blue is one of the four profile colors in the tool

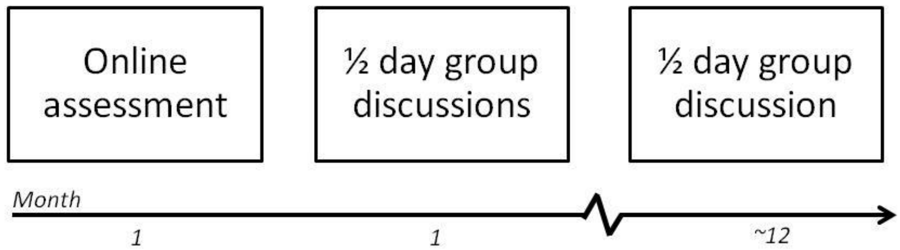


Figure 11 – Team C's assessment process

The manager leaving the company shortly after the assessment test was taken explained the reason why no follow-up was made. Since he did not meet the new manager, no hand over took place. However, the first manager was described as very focused on personal development of the team members, so discussions around these topics were always taking place during the bi-weekly one-to-one meetings, both before and after the assessment.

The interviewees had a clear view of why they conducted the test and what it would be used for. Since the manager put a strong focus on personal development, none of the interviewees were surprised when he initiated the assessment process. However, some respondents were slightly hesitant to the assessment test after previously experienced unintended consequences of the outcome.

"At my previous employer, the personality profiles of the employees were included in the organizational chart. It then became obvious that some profiles were overrepresented among managers in leading positions, consequently subordinates strived to live up to the characteristics of their executives in order to enhance their possibilities to advance in the organization." – Subordinate C1

4.3.2. Effects

In line with the results from team A and B, the interviewees from team C saw the report as more of a verification of what they already knew, with a few insights.

As with team A, the team found the group discussions to be the most rewarding part of the process. They did not only gain a deeper understanding for others, but did also develop their understanding for themselves when they got to compare their profile with the others'.

Overall, the interviewees felt comfortable in sharing their profiles and having discussions on the topic. However, the follow-up session where other teams' profiles were discussed was perceived as uncomfortable:

"I did not feel very comfortable discussing other teams. It became apparent that we did not have the skills required to draw that kind of conclusions and the discussions became very superficial. This was when [Team B] had received training on how to identify different profiles, so I guess that my colleagues were inspired by them." – Subordinate C2

As a result of the assessment, the interviewed subordinates have managed to use the findings from the assessment process. They try to adapt their behavior to the preferences of the team members, and are aware of the difference between people. However, when talking to the initiating manager, it becomes evident that he had planned a more in-depth use of the report.

"My intention was to use the report for coaching purposes. First of all I wanted the team members to gain a deeper understanding for their own profile and how their behavior impacts the surrounding. Second, by spreading the knowledge in the team, I was hoping to enhance the team feeling. Lastly, I knew that some of the team members were not very satisfied with their role, but without knowing their next step. I wanted to use the report as a coaching tool for finding the right next role for them." – Manager C

Due to the manager's exit, the intentions were not fully achieved, even if the participants gained a deeper understanding about themselves and others, and the team feeling was slightly improved.

4.4 Team D

Team D consists of a number of sales executives with an informal leader role. They can be compared to key account managers who are dependent on specialized sellers for certain products. In October 2013 they were sent to a company-internal education with the aim to develop the informal leadership skills.

4.4.1. The assessment process

The training was a pilot project and held for the first time when the interviewees participated. After the training, they were informed that the education would have a follow-up session where their assessment test would be presented and discussed. The purpose of the training was, as expressed by the HR representative, to increase self-awareness and give the participants tools to use in their role as informal leaders.

The assessment tool used in the training was Kenexa, a test not as commonly used as Myer-Briggs or DiSC but similar in style and based on the same principles. [144] After conducting the test, which takes roughly four hours to complete, the respondent got the result as two reports, one describing the test takers aptitude for being a leader, the other describing the developed leadership skills. The two reports were sent to the interviewees, which then were followed by an individual one-hour coaching session with an organizational psychologist that went through the report together with the test taker.

[144] **Kenexa** – offers a plethora of different tests for both recruitment and development purposes. The test used by team D was a behavioural/development test based on Jung's theories and similar to both the Myers-Briggs and Disc-test. The test is designed to measure a persons leadership skills and the fitness of being a leader.

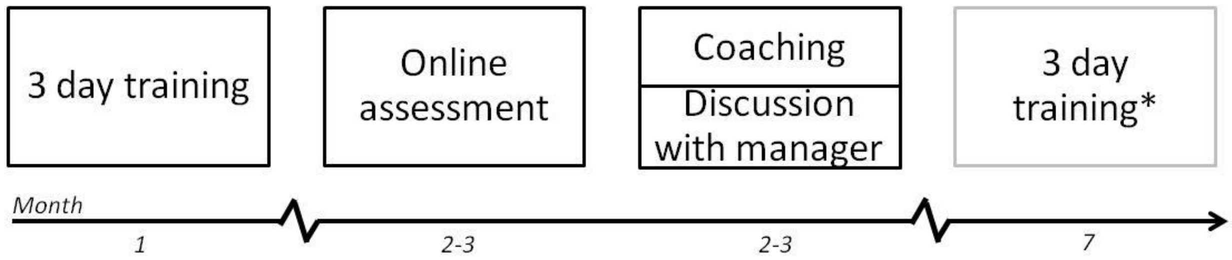


Figure 12 – Team D's assessment process *The training had not taken place by the time of the interviews

After conducting the test and when receiving the test result, several questions had risen among the respondents of how to interpret and act on the information received. Therefore it has been valuable to discuss the outcome with the external psychologist.

"Talking to the psychologist was very valuable for me. I got a thorough explanation of the report, including parts I had difficulties to understand. (...) It was also a safe environment where I could ask questions that I do not think I would have asked my manager or colleagues." – Subordinate D1

The respondents were encouraged by the psychologist to talk to their manager about the report, which some participants did but others did not. The manager did not put much effort in follow up discussion with his employees. Instead it was up to the subordinates to bring it up in the regular coaching session if they felt a need for it. The manager was not really into the whole assessment test activity as such, he thought his time could be spent on better things than discussing his subordinates personalities and motivation factors.

Since the initiative was launched on a short-term notice, the manager for the project team was short of knowledge and consequently could not provide the rest of the team with relevant information prior to the test. For that reason, the respondents experienced that they lacked information, which made them hesitant on the initiative and had difficulties to see the purpose and the aim of the activity. Especially the lacking communication regarding expected investment of time was problematic.

"The test has a great potential, but there is no time. I cannot take the time to do these tests and reflect upon the result" – Subordinate D2

Due to his limited involvement in the process, the manager had difficulties advocating the assessment tests, even if he could see the benefits of the activity on a larger scale. Both him and one of the interviewees claimed that as long as the activity is not embedded in the organisation's ordinary strategy or operation it will not generate too many benefits for the company.

"The company needs a structural change with more long-term focus where assessment tests are embedded as an employee development tool. (…) based on the test results, peoples personalities and motivation would in the new structure preferably by emphasized to a larger extent" – Subordinate D3

On a day-to-day basis the project group works individually and only on rare occasions come together and work in group format. The interest in learning from each other and about other profiles has therefore been limited and no organised group discussions have taken place. However, the manager believes that the team will discuss the topic further when the whole team has participated in the training.

4.4.2. Effects

The pattern from the other teams was also present in team D, where the test report was more of a verification of what was already know even if few new insights were gained. By putting the respondents in tricky or non-experienced situations that are unfamiliar, the tests have been perceived as a tool where the respondents have learned new valuable insights just by taking the test and to be made think at things and situations that lay outside of the normal working environment and contemplative paths.

"After taking the test, I am much more aware that others might have different drivers than I do. By trying to identify and pressing the right buttons, I believe I am able to engage my colleagues to a greater extent now than I could before". – Subordinate D2

"If I earn a few thousands more it does not really matter. Of course I would not disagree to a pay rise (...) to be able to plan my own time is what is important. I need to pick up my kids at school and drive them to the soccer practice (...) working at home is valuable for me". – Subordinate D1

From the managerial perspective, the manager said that he has tried to make some minor adaptations including a more conscious assignment of tasks. A main constraint to engage further has been lack of time. In addition, he has tried to give more thought through incentives in the flexible part of the otherwise quite inflexible incentive program.

"I know my subordinates quite well, I know their personalities and I know what motivates them. (…) Much of it I knew before hand but some new information I gained by reading their test results. I knew flexibility and freedom would score high, but as long as the company's strategy is to motivate by financial means I cannot really do much about the situation anyway. " – Manager D

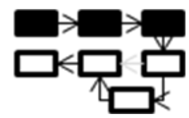
Even if the assessment process is not yet finalized, one of the interviewees expresses a positive effect.

"After participating in the training, I feel that that I have improved the understanding about myself and others. (...) The new insights and the opportunity to apply them have definitely increased my work motivation" – Subordinate D1

5. Analysis

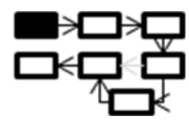
The analysis will be divided into two main sections, aligned with the theoretical framework. Firstly, the formal assessment process and its components will be analyzed. Secondly, the effects associated with using the test will be evaluated into.

5.1. The formal assessment process



As outlined in the theoretical framework, the first part of the model describes the intention, implementation and employees' experience of the formal assessment process. This will be done through evaluating the different steps in the theoretical framework and how they are linked with each other.

5.1.1. Intended practices



When it comes to the intentions of HR processes, Purcell et al.'s model take departure in HRM practices as a strategic issues initiated by senior management. The fact that three of the four managers initiated the assessment process themselves brings another dimension to the model. With no or limited involvement from HR, this resulted in the FLM taking full responsibility of the process including the formulation of the intention of the practice. This might allow an increased freedom in the design and implementation of the practice, even if the alignment with the extended organization still needs to be considered.

The intended HR practice needs to be a good fit with the internal and external dimensions of the company's strategy, structure, company life cycle and processes in order for the practice to be successfully implemented.[145] The observed companies are big, process-driven companies where many business decisions and operational activities are formalized into processes. The three self-initiated assessment programs were not connected to any formalized company process resulting in limited structured support for the assessment program and the full responsibility for the success of the program was allocated to the manager. The lack of a formalized process did not only deviate from common practices, but did also put the full responsibility of the program on the manager in an environment where the dependency on formalized processes usually is high.

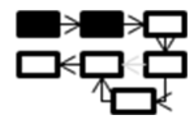
Both studied companies are very data driven, where KPIs and quantified measures are widely used. In order to initiate any kind of project, it is not uncommon that approvals are needed from a number of decision makers. Most decisions have to be motivated in a detailed business case that clearly states the estimated return on the investment (ROI). Given the more qualitative aspects of assessment tools, the monetary impact of an assessment process is hard to measure and therefore possibly given lower priority in favor of projects where the ROI can be calculated more easily. As the interviewed managers have seen the potential benefits, they initiated the process themselves.

One of the studied teams was part of the company's sales organization with a clear focus on short-term revenue maximization. The company puts a big focus on monetary rewards for

[145] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). People management and performance.

fulfillment of sales targets. Monetary rewards are, if not the only, at least by far the most used reward tool in the company, which is also supported by McGregor and the common use of theory X.[146] When comparing the long-term possibilities provided by the assessment tools, focusing on personal development and self-awareness; with the short-term focus in the company, there is a potential mismatch. A few of the respondents claimed that the test as such gave good insights, but the opportunities to use the output for adapting rewards was very limited due to the fairly inflexible reward schemes provided by the company.

5.1.2. Formulation and enactment of intended practices

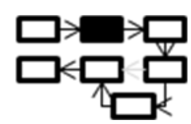


Since the initiation and enactment of the assessment process are connected to three of the four managers, the distance between intended and actual practices are not as distanced as in cases where the intended practices are formulated by a remote function, given to the FLMs to act upon.

In addition to ensuring that the intended practice is aligned with the company, the existence of an intention as such can be seen as a matter of course. However, this has not been the case everywhere. While manager A and manager C had a clear view of what they wanted to achieve with the assessment, manager B claimed that he did not have a clear view of the purpose. As he could see some potential benefits with using the assessments tool, he was willing to take the chance without investing too much time and energy.

In the case of team D and their HR organized training, the FLM had no formal responsibility, and was not very involved in the process. Instead, the employees participating in the education came to be responsible for setting up a meeting with the manager themselves in order to involve the manager in the process. The training and use of the assessment tool had a clear intention from the HR function, yet the FLM did only receive a brief introduction to the training. Thereby, the allocation of responsibility for including the FLM was given to the participating subordinates.

5.1.3. Actual practices



In line with existing research, the role of the FLM has proven to be especially important for the execution of the assessments, also when they are not the initiators themselves.[147] As discussed by McGovern et al., it is the individual motivation and interest rather than the institutional pressure that determines the degree of involvement in the practice. [148] The success of the assessment process is thereby highly dependent on the commitment and interest from the FLM.

[146] McGregor, Douglas (2006): *The Human Side of Enterprise*.
[147] Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence.
[148] McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?.

5.1.3.1. Managers' interest

Commitment to people management is one driver of the areas associated with FLMs.[149] Among the three managers who initiated the test themselves, manager A and manager C had a very clear view of what they were expecting to achieve. They both had a big interest for personality profiling and assessment tools and the main benefits from using them. During the interviews, they both gave examples of situations where the knowledge of different profiles had been valuable for them, and how the ability to identify different personalities gave them the opportunity to adapt their communication to the prevailing situation. While these two managers initiated the assessment process with the clear intention to achieve similar outcomes as they had experienced themselves, manager B did not have a clear view of what to achieve with the process. Also, he did not express the same genuine interest in the tools, even if he could see benefits from using them.

5.1.3.2. Managers' time

According to literature, lack of time has been pointed out to be a key challenge for FLMs to engage in HR practices.[150] Some of the interviewees have mentioned lack of time as reason for why assessment results are sometimes forgotten or given a low priority. Neither manager A nor manager C did however mention lack of time as a reason for not engaging in the assessment process, while manager B and manager D more explicitly pronounced time constraints as a reason for not engaging in the process to a greater extent.

5.1.3.3. Managers' skills

Another limitation of FLM's role in the assessment process has to do with their inability to handle and interpret test results.[151] Both managers and their employees have expressed concerns regarding the managers' lack of expertise in dealing with the results since they in general do not possess knowledge or experience in the area. While some of the managers have something that can be described as 'interest-generated skills', meaning that they provide insights and add value on the basis of their explicitly expressed interest in personality tests, they lack the in-depth expertise required to capture the more subtle dimensions of the assessments. This type of skills requires extensive training and experience that FLMs seldom possess nor are expected to.

5.1.3.4. Managers' impact

When comparing the answers from the interviewed managers, it becomes evident that the attitude towards assessment tools and personality profiling is of significant importance when it comes to the way the assessments are viewed upon and used. A genuine interest, as expressed by manager A and manager C does not only seem to trigger the usage of assessment tools as such; but also prioritization of time and resources; and the level of skills required for leveraging on the test results.

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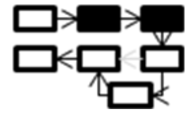
[149] Cunningham, I., & Hyman, J. (1995). Transforming the HRM vision into reality: the role of line managers and supervisors in implementing change.

[150] McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?

[151] Ibid.

5.1.4. Actual practices – experienced practices



From the interviews it can be concluded that the degree of planning of the assessment processes vary. While two processes were initiated on a more stand alone, ad hoc basis (B and C); the other two were more structured, with planned follow-up sessions (A and D). Both the ad hoc and the planned processes consisted of a number of activities that used the output from the assessment. This can be categorized into: usage of an external coach; team discussions; discussions with manager; and corresponding training. Each team's activities are illustrated below:

Activity	A	B	C	D
External coach	X		X	X
Team discussions	X		X	
Discussion with manager		X		X
Corresponding training	X			X

Figure 13 – Overview of associated activities by team

External coach

Some teams used an external coach with professional training and certification in the assessment tool that assisted in interpreting the result from the test. The coach could help the test taker to develop a deeper understanding for the test result by explaining personality traits, giving examples of concrete situations where the behavior was described or educating in how to apply the knowledge about other profiles. The use of an external coaches occurred on both individual and group basis, where the former sessions were more focused on the individuals and interpretation of their test reports; while the latter included a more tutoring role, facilitating group discussions and reflections. The interviewees pointed out two main benefits from using an external coach: 1) the expertise that enabled deeper reflections and understanding for the profile, that neither the test taker nor their managers possessed; and 2) the isolated, individual discussion where the test taker could discuss issues openly without fear of being judged by the manager or colleagues. As argued by Purcell et al. and McGovern et al, the manager's lack of skills complicates the execution of HRM practices, why it might be complemented with the presence of an external expert, possessing the skills and thereby enabling understanding and reflection.[152, 153] By involving the external coach, the managers did complement the actual process with skills that they did not possess themselves, closing the competence gap.

Team discussion

Discussions regarding the test results, its validity, application areas etc. with team members occurred in two of the teams. Different structures of the discussions were used, e.g. presentation of

[152] Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Swart, J., & Rayton, B. (2008). People management and performance.
[153] McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?

one's profile with corresponding dialogues, aggregation of team members' results to a team-based view and exercises in how to approach different team members optimally. The group discussions were very popular among the interviewees as it gave a better understanding for the different profiles in the group as well as for oneself. It did also increase the understanding for the different profiles and their preferences in general as they were exemplified from the perspective of a co-worker with a following discussion on how that person argued in certain situations.

Conversation with manager

Two teams (B and D) had individual session with the manager where the test results were discussed explicitly, while the other two teams (A and C) integrated discussions on the results in normal coaching sessions. For the teams with separate report discussions, the interviewed subordinates claim that the session was not very value adding for them personally, but that they believe it gave the manager a better understanding for their profile and preferences. This leader-member exchange related activity can be seen as a good way of increasing the chances for an improved exchange.[154] A reason for the perceived lack of value creation from these sessions could be the reasons mentioned as benefits from using an external coach: expertise and fear of being judged. Since the evaluation of personality assessments seldom is a core competence of a first line manager, it is likely that the manager has difficulties in asking questions that stimulates deeper discussions and reflections. Moreover, as the manager is the person evaluating the performance of the employee, there's a potential fear of expressing weaknesses or other aspects that increases the risk of e.g. bad appraisals.

Corresponding training

Two of the teams took the test in conjunction with training on a corresponding topic. Instead of taking the test on a stand-alone basis, it can be combined with training or even be taken as a smaller component in a bigger training initiative. The two teams took the assessments for two separate purposes: improving coaching skills; and development of informal leadership. By using the assessment as a part of the training that included both presentations by experts as well as group discussions, the assessment was put into a context where the purpose and foremost, the usability became clearer.

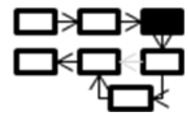
5.1.4.2. Bundling

According to the interviewees, the test report as such has been of limited value in the process as it mostly has been a verification of what they already knew. Instead, they stress the value generated from participating in associated activities, where the test report was used as an enabler for deeper understanding of oneself and others. Numerous interviewees had taken part in similar assessments earlier, using different assessment tools. The tools that the interviewees have experience from were perceived to be similar in terms of structure and results, while the bundling of associated activities varied. Yet, e.g. team A expressed a very strong satisfaction from the test process and claimed that previous experiences from assessment tools had been far from as rewarding. One should keep in

[154] Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). Perceived organizational support and leader-member exchange: A social exchange perspective.

mind that they used MBTI, a criticized tool with questioned validity and relevance.[155] Despite the criticism, team A has come far in their usage of the tool in comparison to the other teams. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that choice of the assessment tool as such is not as important as the way it is bundled with associated activities.

5.1.5. Experienced practices



Apart from the experience of the associated activities, the interviewed subordinates provided some insights in how they experienced the process as a whole. Everyone was satisfied with the use of assessment tools and could outline a number of benefits from using the tool. The positive effects from taking the assessment will be discussed further in next section. On a more generic note, almost everyone came back to three key aspects that were of significant importance when it came to the experience of the process: (1) A good understanding for the underlying purpose of the assessment; (2) For what the results would be used; and (3) Knowledge of how to portray oneself in the test.

While most interviewees experienced that they received sufficient information regarding the purpose and intended use of the assessment results, some think that the third aspect was problematic.

5.1.5.1. Test-related experiences

The lack of communication regarding what situational perspective to answer from, generated a degree of insecurity among the interviewees. Several of the interviewees claimed that they would behave differently in e.g. a professional and a private setting, generating insecurity of how to answer when taking the test.

Another problem that arose during the interviews is the possibility of deliberate manipulation of the test results by providing answers in line with how you want to be perceived or how you want to personate yourself rather than your actual behaviour.[156] Some of the interviewees were referring to a state which can be explained as a "problem of experience". Since it is not uncommon that participants have come across the same or similar test in the past, they have already received a profile of their personality. This suggests that as the participants have been profiled in a certain manner previously, there is a risk that the answers are consciously or unconsciously manipulated in order to be aligned with the previous profiling.

Connected to the problem of experience, the so called social desirability responding were mentioned by some.[157] Even if they did not explicitly say that they had answered the questions in a way that would generate a certain desirable profile, they still indicated that it was a possibility,

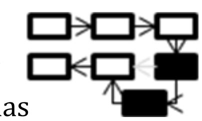
[155] Goodstein, L. D., & Lanyon, R. I. (1999). Applications of personality assessment to the workplace: A review.
[156] Arthur Jr, W., & Glaze, R. M. (2011). Cheating and Response Distortion on Remotely Delivered Assessments.
[157] Ibid.

5.1.5.2. Purpose and usage

Even if the interviewees experienced that the first two key aspects mentioned above, an understanding for the purpose and how the results would be used, were satisfactory, their importance remain. The examples of the unsuccessful assessment initiative on industrial workers and the inclusion of personality profiles in the organizational chart illustrate the importance of how the FLM implements the practice, by e.g. communicating the reasons why to take part in the assessment, and for what the results will be used.[158] While the former example refers to the importance of communicating the intention behind the practice, the latter might give the employees the perception that they need to belong to a certain group or category if they want to have a chance to advance in the organization.

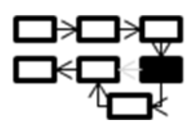
Both these examples illustrate the need to be clear and consistent in the communication on what the information will be used for. If the test takers suspect that their answers will be used against them or that they might reduce their chances for advancement, they might manipulate their answers so that the test results are in line with what they believe is a "good profile" or even be reluctant towards taking the test at all.

5.2. Effects



The effects from the formal assessment process have turned out to primarily be related to an increased awareness of one's own and others' preferences and how different personalities think and behave. Moreover, this new knowledge has generated a set of behavioral changes as well as enabled an extended reasoning around managers' and the extended organizations' opportunities to adapt the work situation with employee preferences.

5.2.1. Employee preferences



As defined in the theoretical framework, employee preferences refer to the attitudinal outcomes from taking the test; and the awareness of individuals' preferences in terms of work design and rewards.

5.2.1.1. A verification rather than new information

When it comes to the perceived value of the personality profiling, most interviewees argue that the profile was very precise and consistent with their view of themselves. A few interviewees' profiles did not match entirely, but the overall satisfaction with the test validity was high. Many of them said they already knew their personality quite well before taking the test, but getting the results in the form of a tangible report was valuable. Despite the already existing self-awareness, the reports were expressed in detailed and accurate formulations that the interviewees would have difficulties formulating themselves, making the abstract concept of employee preferences more concrete.

[158] Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence

Thereby, the employee preferences are to some extent clarified, but mostly verified, expressed in a precise way that the interviewees agree with, but would have difficulties in formulating themselves.

The interviewees did mainly focus on preferences regarding work design, e.g. preferred ways of communicating, decision making, and working style. Preferences regarding rewards were not expressed as explicitly. Team D did however distinguish themselves here, mainly due to the fact that the received test report contained a section explicitly focusing on motivation factors, many of them directed towards rewards. The two other assessment tools did mention motivation factors as well, but not as explicitly focused on rewards as in the Kenexa reports. This shows that the structure and formulation of the report not only verifies the personality of the test taker, but also determines what aspects are considered in discussions.

5.2.1.2. More important to understand the difference of others

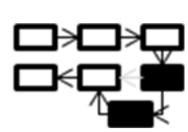
Many of the interviewees have described the assessment tool as a great method for understanding that people in their surrounding are different compared to oneself. This might come as a matter of course, but to actually get the chance to understand how other people behave in different situations have, to most participants, been a far better take-away than the insights about oneself. This was more explicitly expressed among the interviewees whom had participated in group discussions and thereby had the opportunity to compare the own profile with the closest colleagues and at the same time gotten a more extended explanation by the certified coach. This stresses once again the importance of associated activities and coaches with the skills to lead discussions and exemplify traits of different profiles.

The assessment test and the associated activities have thereby served as a good tool for understanding the different employee preferences of others, mainly in two dimensions: (1) increased understanding for the preferences among the individuals in the own team; and (2) increased understanding for varying preferences among people in general, and in which dimensions people tend to differ from oneself.

5.2.1.3. Potential limitations

Even if the perceived validity of the tests was overall good, the interviewees were aware of the limitations associated with categorizing people in certain profiles. As described by the interviewees, the main risk of using this type of tool is the potential lock-in effect it might generate. By taking the profiling too literally, assuming that the person behaves in the exact same way as describe by the profile, the individuals are reduced to their profiles rather than the individuals they really are. As described by one of the interviewees, it is very frustrating to be attributed a certain trait on the basis of a profile instead of reality. By accepting that the report is a simplification and that it should be used as an indication rather than an absolute truth, the positive benefits can however be achieved.

5.2.2. Employee preferences – adapted behavior



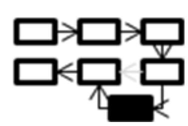
A positive aspect the assessment tests have brought to the interviewed groups is the ability to create a common language. This is something several respondents have pointed out as an important yet somewhat underestimated outcome of the assessment tests. They are, after going through the whole process, able to communicate on a new level with each other. Some respondents express it as if they commonly have created a new and deeper way of communicating with each other. This is something that clearly shows when they work in other constellations where some group members have not taken the assessment test. The common language leads to efficacy gains since almost no time has be spent on describing the profile or profile trait, but most importantly, reduces the risk of misunderstandings since test takers have received the same education and have access to the same material for interpretation.

In addition, the strength of having a common language also resulted in a new way of giving each other feedback. Several of the interviewees spoke about situations when they have used the profiles or profile traits, often in a humorous way, to give colleagues feedback. This also occurred in teams which had not used structured group discussions, but only talked about the test in more informal situations.

In accordance with Goodstein Lanyon, the lack of a common approach to describe individuals' behaviour complicates the communication around people management and the human resources.[159] By conducting training programs the participants have, according to the empirics, developed a common language for describing personality traits. As observed among the interviewed teams, this common language platform has resulted in a more effective communication through concretization of the abstract concept of personality. However, a common yet standardized language might result in that the environment is only analyzed in the dimensions covered by the tool, disregarding aspects not captured in it.

As pointed out by many of the interviewees, the physical test report was a great enabler of dialogue and discussions. Having the same report format but varying personality descriptions allowed the participants to target and compare certain aspects of personalities on a fairly concrete level. The words *starting point* or *platform* has been used to describe the impact of having a physical report in individual and group discussions. This has turned out to be particularly rewarding in conversations with the manager.

5.2.3. Adapted behavior



Given the increased understanding for one's own and others' preferences, a number of behavioral changes have been identified. The changes are mostly related to the way the interviewees see and approach others, but some potential areas for a further adaptation of work design and rewards have also been identified.

5.2.3.1. Individual changes

Interviewees claim that they have not changed ways of reasoning and thinking about themselves and their own profile very much since taking the assessment. Rather, the interviewees describe how they have started to approach people differently based on their profile. With that said, the

[159] Goodstein, L. D., & Lanyon, R. I. (1999). Applications of personality assessment to the workplace: A review.

empirics indicate that awareness of one's preferences and traits do seldom lead to attempts to change profile into a more desirable mode. Instead, the interviewees focus on approaching other people in a manner that is aligned with the counterparty's preferences. If they know their profile, they adapt to it. If they talk to a person whose profile they are unsure of, they still bear in mind that people are different and might act in different ways. For the team that was explicitly trained in reading different personalities, a few of the interviewees claimed that they actively used their knowledge to read profiles and adapt their behavior accordingly.

5.2.3.2. The company's changes

Despite the fairly high degree of adaptation towards colleagues among the interviewed subordinates, the bigger part of possible adaptation towards employees' preferences regarding work design and rewards are in the hands of the managers and the extended organization. Not only role descriptions, allocation of tasks and work processes, but also formal and informal reward systems are controlled by managers.

As theory states, employees perform better when they receive benefits[160], and in particular benefits with a high valence[161]. As employees' preferences have been identified and communicated, the manager is theoretically in a position where work design and rewards can be adapted to preferences, strengthening the psychological contract between employee and employer.[162] Yet, there are circumstances that complicate this potential adaptation. According to the interviewed managers, there are limited possibilities to make any significant changes. Two main reasons have been pointed out during the interviews: (1) The role does often have inherent attributes that require a certain set of skills, interests and preferences that are unchangeable; and (2) the manager is often required to follow company procedures and practices that must be adhered to, especially in big organizations. As pointed out by one of the managers, the assessment tests can be used to ensure that employees are in a role that is aligned with their preferences, and that misplaced employees thereby can be encouraged to find more suitable positions.

Once again, the manager's interest in using assessment tools seems to be a decisive factor. While manager A and C mentioned numerous ways on how to adapt their behavior in terms of work design as well as rewards, manager B and D were more hesitant and referred to the limitations mentioned above.

As stated above, the employee preferences regarding rewards were seldom explicitly discussed by the interviewees, although some mentioned monetary rewards and recognition. Despite the often inflexible reward systems manager D stated that he, since his subordinates conducted the assessment, has changed how he works with the adjustable part of the reward system and that he tries to consider the employee's preferences.

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[160] Uhl-Bien, M., Graen, G. B., & Scandura, T. A. (2000). Implications of leader-member exchange (LMX) for strategic human resource management systems: Relationships as social capital for competitive advantage.

[161] Vroom, V. H. (1964). Work and motivation.

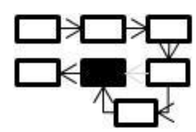
[162] Grant, D. (1999). HRM, rhetoric and the psychological contract: a case of'easier said than done'.

Our respondents have openly shared information about the outcome and result from these tests, the same information they have shared with their superiors too. When asking about motivational factors, the answers reveal a clear bias towards intrinsic motivation, where factors such as interesting and developing work and work autonomy are mentioned. Extrinsic motivation factors such as monetary rewards, status and titles are seldom mentioned in the interviews, supporting the Deci & Ryan's self-determination theory and the desirable stage of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation.[163] On the basis of this information, the relative importance of a satisfactory work design over rewards becomes evident. As employees value the intrinsically motivating aspects over extrinsically motivating aspects, managers and the extended organization should put their efforts in this area.

Nevertheless, the companies still reward and try to motivate their employees by monetary incentive programs, which is also the case in the observed teams. The managers are aware of the problem, but still the company continues with the same old strategy. This clearly shows that the company and its top managers is still stuck in a system where monetary rewards are common, while the employees have moved on and requires a motivational system focusing on intrinsic motivation.[164, 165]

Even if the there are difficulties associated with aligning work design and rewards with employee preferences, manager A and manager C have exemplified when this has taken place. They have also shown a more conscious way of communicating with their subordinates as they both adapted their approaches on the basis of the profiles. Once again, those were the managers that had a genuine interest in this area, why McGovern's research on importance of interest in HRM also might be applicable in the adaption as well.[166]

5.2.4. Behavioral outcomes



As described in the theoretical framework, employee engagement is closely related to discretionary behavior and OCB. As concluded earlier in the analysis, the understanding for employee preferences has increased due to the usage of assessment tools. Connecting to the previous section, these findings allow for an adaptation of behavior among peers and managers, focusing mostly on adaptation of communication, but also adaptation of work design and rewards. When applying these adaptations in the perspective of the concepts of psychological contracts, leader-member exchange and perceived organizational support, these are strengthened and are thereby expected to increase the employee engagement. This rather theoretical approach is supported in the empirics, where at least some of the interviewees have said that their engagement has increased as a result of the usage of the assessment tools.

163 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being..

164 McGregor, Douglas (2006): The Human Side of Enterprise.

165 Pink, D. H. (2011). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*.

166 McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line?

Even if some of the interviewees indicate they feel more engaged in their job, it is not possible to draw any significant conclusions regarding the change in *level* of employee engagement. However, the purpose of the thesis has only been to investigate *how* and not to what extent employee engagement is impacted by the usage of assessment tools.

In summary, the identification and increased awareness of employee preferences achieved through the usage of assessment tools allows adaptation of behavior among peers, managers and the extended organization. When adaptation leads to increased alignment with employee preferences, the thesis finds both theoretical and empirical support for a positive impact on employee engagement.

6. Conclusions

In this section the findings from the thesis will be summarized. First, the objective of the thesis is briefly recapitulated. Second, the findings from the assessment process are presented. Third, the effects from participating in an assessment process are described.

6.1. Addressing the research questions

The objective of this study has been to examine how the usage of assessment tools is initiated, implemented and experienced in companies, and how potential effects from the usage of assessment tools might impact employee engagement. Many studies have been made in the area of assessment tools as such, but few studies have captured and investigated the implementation of the tool or employee's attitudes and experiences towards the test. The thesis has been structured around two main areas: the implementation and experience of the formal assessment process; and the effects from participating in an assessment process.

6.2. The assessment process

The structure of the assessment process has been found to vary between the teams, where some had a clear view of the desired outcomes and how to achieve them, while others have been more opportunistic and initiated the process on a more ad hoc basis. While most HR practices typically are initiated by the HR function, the use of assessment tools has in many cases been initiated by the first line managers (FLMs). By initiating the assessment process themselves, they were left in a position where they had to act on their own without any administrative support from the organization.

Within the four teams included in the study, the respondents have conducted three different assessment tests. Nevertheless, the empirical findings from the teams still correlate to a high degree. The tests are based on the similar principles but it also suggests the test itself to be of limited importance for effecting employee preferences. The experienced value creation is mainly related to how the assessment is bundled with associated activities, which enables reflection and discussions on the topic of varying personalities. The presence of an external expert and structured group discussions has helped the participants deepening their understanding of themselves, but mostly about others.

Since the case-companies' engagement in the usage of assessment test varies, the FLMs' attitudes towards the assessment tests have shown to have a great impact on both the process and effects. Given the importance of the engagement and interest among the FLMs, the manager can be seen as an enabler of the process rather than a leader of the process as such. By prioritizing the assessments time wise, creating commitment in the team, and organizing the assessment process, including associated activities, the managers will not have to spend time on activities where they lack skills and where they subsequently might deliver poor results.

The experience from the assessment process is overall positive. The interviewees felt they could see the purpose and area of use for the test, yet several experienced a degree of uncertainty related to the test as such, where some of the interviewees had difficulties knowing how to portray themselves in the test.

6.3. The effects

The thesis has in addition to investigating the implementation and experience of the formal assessment process also investigated what effects the usage of assessment tools had in the organization. Two main areas have been described: the identification and level of awareness of one's own and others' preferences in terms of work design and rewards; and the degree of adaptation to these preferences.

On an individual level, the assessment test result has been described as verifying already known personality traits rather than providing new insights. The assessment report has however expressed the personalities in a very precise and comprehensive way, formulations that the test takers would have difficulties formulating themselves. The main benefit from taking the test was instead the increased understanding of others' preferences. Based on newfound information of colleagues, the interviewees expressed a more concrete understanding about people's different reasoning and behaviours.

The physical report has to a great extent been used as a platform to facilitate peer-to-peer discussion as well as discussion with the manager. The report and associated discussions has resulted in the usage of a common language where personalities are discussed with the same vocabulary. Employees express that this has made them more efficient since conflicts and misunderstandings has been reduced. The common language has also enabled a new way of giving each other feedback.

Based on the increased understanding about others, a certain degree of adaption of behaviour has taken place. The change in behaviour is mainly related to changes in how people approach others, especially other colleagues. The managers have also made changes in the way they approach their subordinates, but they have also had additional opportunities for adaptation of work design and reward systems. Some managers have embraced this opportunity while others claim that they have limited possibilities of making adaptations due to two main limitations: (1) Roles have inherent attributes that always are required; and (2) inflexible processes and policies in the organization.

When comparing the answers from the interviewed managers, it becomes evident that the attitude towards assessment tools and personality profiling is of significant importance when it comes to the way the assessments are looked upon and used. A genuine interest does not only seem to trigger the usage of assessment tools as such; but also prioritization of time and resources; and the level of skills required for leveraging on the test results. In terms of adaptation, genuinely interested managers can give examples of adaptations of work design and rewards, where consideration has been taken to the employee preferences.

The interviewees expressed a strong preference towards intrinsic motivation factors. The managers were aware of this, but claimed the extended organization provided limited opportunities for adhering to this. This supports earlier findings in the area, where companies are described as being stuck in a stage where they offer their employees the same type of extrinsically motivating incentives, independent on employee preferences.

As described in the thesis, theory and empirical findings support that the usage of assessment tools, through an increased awareness about one's own and others' employee preferences, enables opportunities for adaptation of behavior. Even if it is hard to track how assessment tools impact the *level* of employee engagement, it is found that colleagues and managers not only have the opportunity, but also do increase levels of employee engagement through adaptation of behavior to be aligned with employee preferences regarding work design and rewards.

7. Discussion

In this section the theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations and potential areas of further research will be discussed.

7.1. Theoretical contributions

In the thesis, the limited research on practical application and employees' experience of HR practices has been addressed by complementing the research on experience of practices, and more specifically, the experience of using assessment tools. The thesis supports earlier findings on the importance of first line managers in the delivery of HR practices but also suggests how e.g. lack of interest impacts the implementation.

Previous research on assessment tools has mainly been concerned with the validity of the tool as well as analyzing how certain personality traits impact the organization. By investigating the implications of the implementation of the assessment process as such, the thesis has provided insights in how the usage of assessment tools is not only dependent on the validity of the test, but also the structure of the implementation process as such.

Purcell et al.'s HR causal chain model is focusing on the FLM as an agent bringing HR practices, formulated by others, to life. The thesis has brought attention to situations where formulation of intended practice and enactment can be traced to the same person, and how this requires interest and resources to manage the practice outside formalized company processes. Another aspect of Purcell et al.'s model is the limitations of iterations in HR practices. The linear structure of the process requires adaptation to capture the iterative elements of e.g. assessment tools.

7.2. Managerial implications

As outlined in the introduction, the degree of employee engagement can be described as fairly low. Through a structured application of assessment tools, the thesis concludes that there are opportunities for identifying and communicating employee preferences, preferences that can be adhered to in the work design and use of rewards, leading to increased levels of employee engagement.

Due to the variation in employee preferences, the manager but also the extended organization should consider flexibility in work design and reward systems to allow for adaptation to be aligned with employee preferences.

The communication has time after time proven to be a key to people's attitudes, perception, and willingness to conduct a test. Therefore the importance of communicating the purpose, usage etc. must not be overlooked or neglected at any stage of the process.

7.3. Limitations

Since the interviewees conducted the assessment for quite some time ago, there is a risk that they have forgotten some aspects of the assessment, but also changed their version in retrospect. An alternative would have been to study more recent processes, but this would impact the opportunity to observe permanent changes generated by the usage of assessment tools.

As the study has taken place at two American multinational companies, the findings from the thesis might be dependent on the shared characteristics of these two companies and thereby not be applicable to e.g. smaller companies or companies from other parts of the world.

7.4. Areas for further research

Due to limitations in scope, we chose to exclude any quantification of changes in employee engagement and business performance related to the usage of assessment tools. Given the connection between engagement and performance presented in previous literature, it would be interesting to quantify the impact of assessment tools on employee engagement and business outcomes.

Given the study's limitations in terms of studied companies, it would be of interest to also investigate if our findings could be verified in other types of companies. Another area for further studies would be to bring in cultural differences in the equation and then compare international companies with domestic ones in order to see if differences can be identified.

In the thesis, the usage of assessment tools was initiated by the managers themselves in three out of the four teams. It would be valuable to gain deeper knowledge about how assessment tools are implemented when the process is planned and initiated by the HR function instead of the FLM.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Interviews

Company X

Team A

Manager A	2014-04-21
Subordinate A1	2014-04-04
Subordinate A2	2014-04-04
Subordinate A3	2014-04-04
Subordinate A4	2014-04-04
Subordinate A5	2014-04-04

Team B

Manager B	2014-04-04
Subordinate B1	2014-04-10
Subordinate B2	2014-04-15

Team C

Manager C	2014-04-23
Subordinate C1	2014-04-16
Subordinate C2	2014-04-16
Subordinate C3	2014-04-23

Other

HR representative	2014-04-10

Company Y

Team D

Manager D	2014-03-18
Subordinate D1	2014-03-19
Subordinate D2	2014-03-20
Subordinate D3	2014-03-25
HR representative	2014-04-23
Coach	2014-04-04

Additional interviews

Test provider 1	2014-02-18
Test provider 2	2014-03-06
Consultant 1	2014-02-24
Consultant 2	2014-03-12

9.2. Interview questions employees, Swedish

- (Datum, person, titel och företag)

Användningen av personlighetstest

- Berätta lite hur processen kring personlighetstestet gick till?
- Upplevelsen, vad tyckte du var bra/ dåligt?
    - Några nya insikter?
    - Överensstämde det med din bild av dig själv?
    - Lärde du dig något nytt? Eller var det bara en verifiering av vad du redan visste?
- Har du gjort liknande personlighetstest förut?
    - Om ja, vad skilde de testerna från det nya testet?

Reflektion och kommunikation

- Har du kunnat reflektera individuellt över resultatet?
- Har du diskuterat resultatet med andra? (testdeltagare, kollegor, familj och vänner, dvs. andra personer än din chef)
- Har du diskuterat det med din chef? På vilket sätt?
- Har du fått ta del av några verktyg eller resurser i syfte att fördjupa din förståelse för resultatet? (coaching, övningar etc.)

Anpassning och förändring

- Hur har du kunnat använda dina (nya) insikter i ditt individuella arbete?
- Har kollegor och vänner förändrat sitt förhållningssätt till dig? Och vice versa?
- Givet resultatet från testet och att du diskuterat detta med din chef, har chefen förändrat något i sitt förhållningssätt till dig?
- Har du och din chef anpassat din arbetssituation och förändrat något i verksamheten?
- Använder du och din chef resultatet i coachsamtal?
- Finns det några tillkortakommanden? (Dvs. man gör ett test som inte används, testet görs för sällan så data är gammal, ingen förändring etc.)
- Vad är din samlade bedömning kring processen från test till i dag? Dvs. har testet utmynnat i förbättringar eller haft andra positiva effekter?

Motivation

- Vad motiverar dig?
- Tillfredsställs dina motivationsfaktorer i din nuvarande miljö? Och på vilket sätt?
- På vilket sätt skulle detta kunna förbättras ytterligare?
- Känner du dig mer motiverad/ engagerad i ditt arbete idag jämfört med före testet?

9.3. Interview questions employees, English

- (Date, person, title and company)

The use of personality tests

- Tell us how the process of personality test was conducted?

- The experience, what did you think was good/ bad?
    - Any new insights?
    - Was it consistent with your image of yourself?
    - Did you learn anything new? Or was it just a validation of what you already knew?
- Have you done similar personality test before?
    - If yes, what separated the new tests from the previous tests?

Reflection and communication

- Have you been able to individually reflect on the result?
- Have you discussed the results with others? (Test participants, colleagues, family and friends, i.e. other persons than your manager)
- Have you discussed it with your executives? In what way?
- Have you been given any tools or resources to deepen your understanding of the results? (Coaching, training, etc.)

Adaptation and Change

- How were you able to use your (new) insights in your individual work?
- Have colleagues and friends changed their attitude towards you? And vice versa?
- Given the results of the test and that you discussed this with your manager, has your manager changed something in the approach to you?
- Have you and your manager to matched your work situation and changed anything in your work tasks?
- Are you and your manager using the results in coaching sessions?
- Are there any shortcomings? (I.e. to conduct a test that is not used, the test is done too infrequently so the data is old, no change, etc.)
- What is your overall impression of the process, from test until today? I.e. has the test resulted in improvements or had other positive effects?

Motivation

- What motivates you?
- Are your motivation factors satisfied in your current environment? And in what way?
- In what way would this be further improved?
- Do you feel more motivated/ involved in your work today than before the test?

9.4. Interview questions managers, Swedish

- (Datum, person, titel och företag)

Användningen av personlighetstest

- Berätta lite hur processen kring personlighetstestet gick till?
- Upplevelsen (vad tyckte du var bra/ dåligt)?
    - Några nya insikter?
    - Överensstämde det med din bild av dig själv?
    - Lärde du dig något nytt? Eller var det bara en verifiering av vad du redan visste?
- Har du gjort liknande personlighetstest förut?
    - Om ja, vad skilde de testerna från det nya testet?

Reflektion och kommunikation

- Har du kunnat reflektera individuellt över resultatet?
- Har du diskuterat testresultatet med dina medarbetare? På vilket sätt?
- Har du fått ta del av några verktyg eller resurser i syfte att fördjupa dina medarbetares förståelse för resultatet? (coaching, övningar, resurser etc.)
- Hur har du valt att jobba med testresultaten tillsammans med dina medarbetare?
- Vilket är det optima sättet att jobba med det här testet?

Anpassning och förändring

- Givet resultatet från testet, har du förändrat ditt förhållningssätt till dina medarbetare?
- Har du och din medarbetare anpassat dennes arbetssituation och förändrat något i som ett resultat av testet?
- Använder du och dina medarbetare resultatet i coachsamtal?
- Har testet utmynnat i förbättringar eller haft andra positiva effekter?
- Vilka potentiella vinningar ser du med att använda testresultaten?
    - Vilka resurser skulle krävas för att realisera dessa vinningar?
- Finns det några tillkortakommanden? (Dvs. man gör ett test som inte används, testet görs för sällan så data är gammal, ingen förändring etc.)

Motivation

- Hur skulle du beskriva konceptet motivation?
- Tycker du det är viktigt med motiverade medarbete och varför?
- Hur arbetar du med att öka motivationen hos dina medarbete?
- Vad anser du är ditt största hinder från att öka dina medarbetares motivation?
- Upplever du att dina medarbetares motivation varierar från individ till individ? Och hur du hanterar du det?
- Hur hanterar du att olika medarbete motiveras av olika faktorer?
- Hur belönar du dina medarbetare för väl utfört arbete?
- Har du sett någon motivationsförändring hos dina medarbetare sedan testet?
- Har du upplevt någon skillnad mellan personer som gjort testerna mot de som inte gjort testerna (rent generellt)?

9.5. Interview questions managers, English

- (Date, person, title and company)

The use of personality tests

- Tell us how the process of the personality test was carried out?
- The experience, what did you think was good/ bad?
    - Any new insights?
    - Was it consistent with your image of yourself?
    - Did you learn anything new? Or was it just a validation of what you already knew?
- Have you done similar personality test before?

    - If yes, what separated the new tests from the previous tests?

Reflection and communication

- Have you been able to individually reflect on the result?
- Have you discussed the test results with your employees? In what way?
- Have you been given any tools or resources to use in order to deepen your staff's understanding of the result? (Coaching, training, resources, etc.)
- How have you chosen to work with the test results in collaboration with your co-workers?
- What is the optimal way to work with this test?

Adaptation and Change

- Given the results of the test, have you changed your approach to your employees?
- Have you and and your employees adapted the work tasks for him/her as a result of the test?
- Are you and your subordinate using the results in coaching sessions?
- Have the test resulted in improvements or had other positive effects?
- What potential effects do you see in using the test results?
    - What resources would be needed to realize these achievements?
- Are there any shortcomings? (I.e. to conduct a test that is not used, the test is done too infrequently so the data is old, no change, etc.)

Motivation

- How would you describe the motivation concept?
- Do you find it important to have motivated employees? And why?
- What do you do at work in order to increase the motivation of your employees?
- What do you feel is your biggest obstacle in the process of extending your employee's motivation?
- Do you feel that your employees' motivation varies from individual to individual? And how do you handle it?
- How do you handle the fact that employees gets motivated by different factors?
- How do you reward your employees for a good performance?
- Have you seen any change in the motivation level of your employees since they conducted the test?
- Have you experienced any difference between the people who made the tests compared to those who have not done the tests (in general)?