HRM as a motivator to share knowledge -
The importance of seeing the whole picture

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Abstract

Connecting Human Resource Management (HRM) and knowledge transfer through motivation is a new research area. Out of the few existing studies there is a predominance of quantitative studies, which are showing inconclusive results. As a response, this study uses a qualitative micro perspective to investigate how HRM practices influence intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge. It is important to divide motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic, as it impacts knowledge sharing differently. Former studies have identified a need to study the whole HRM system, therefore, to capture differences in motivation among employees exposed to the same system, this thesis takes on a single case study approach. Qualitative interviews were held with employees at an MNC that relies on knowledge intensive activities. The findings showed that employees were motivated intrinsically through career development and extrinsically by the performance management system. The supportive climate showed to influence motivation to share knowledge, both directly and indirectly. Job design was shown to work well in combination with other practices. Finally, a key finding was the importance of having an aligned HRM system.

Key words: Human Resource Management, Knowledge Transfer, Knowledge Sharing, Performance Management System, Career Development, Supportive Climate, Job Design, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation
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Sincerely,
Yasmina Pääkkö & Kristine Samuelsson
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1.0 Introduction

So, there are two sides of things. I think for some, they share knowledge because their boss tells them to. And some just do it because they like to do it, I like to do it.

(Respondent 6)

1.1 Background

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) have an edge over domestic companies since foreign subsidiaries are embedded in external environments which gives them an advantage in sourcing new knowledge from their subsidiaries (Michailova & Mustaffa, 2012). Research into knowledge transfer has shown that the ability for subsidiaries to receive, obtain and send knowledge is an integral part of the competitive advantage of MNCs (Kogut & Zander, 1993; Minbaeva et al., 2003). Knowledge transfer is therefore an important topic to study further since the ability to create and replicate new knowledge enhances competitive advantage through firm growth and expansion (Kogut & Zander, 1993). As MNCs have units located in dispersed locations there is an evident need for fast and efficient knowledge transfer. New information technologies have been able to fill this need through IT-systems that make information accessible across whole MNCs (Klaussegger et al., 2007). IT-systems have therefore become an efficient and commonly used tool for managing knowledge (Ciabuschi, 2005). However, MNCs that invest a lot in these systems also encounter challenges. One of these challenges is to motivate employees to use the systems, due to a perceived lack of value to share knowledge when sometimes there is no direct receiver and no clear idea of how the knowledge will be used (Ciabuschi, 2005). Motivation is a well-studied characteristic that is argued to improve knowledge transfer (Cruz et al., 2009) and to impact the active decision of an individual to engage in knowledge transfer (Husted et al., 2012).

A relatively new line of research claim that HRM (Human Resource Management) can be used in an indirect way to increase knowledge transfer (e.g. Foss et al., 2009; Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva 2005, 2007, 2008). The argument assumes that HRM practises have the ability to affect employee motivation to send or to receive knowledge, but not the knowledge transfer process itself. In other words, motivation works as the mediating factor in the relationship between HRM practises and knowledge transfer. Others have argued that HRM is an underused tool for companies, as employees are often performing under their maximum ability (Huselid, 1995; Mitchell et al., 2013). This means that if properly motivated through the use of HRM...
practises, employees will reach their potential and help to improve a firm's competitive advantage (Huselid, 1995). The following section will more closely present studies on HRM and knowledge transfer, with motivation as the mediating factor.

1.2 Problem statement

Most researchers who have studied HRM practices and knowledge transfer, have done so by focusing on extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation (e.g. Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016; Husted et al., 2012; Minbaeva, 2005, 2007, 2008; Minbaeva et al., 2012). Extrinsic motivation is based on performance were employees are rewarded with monetary means e.g. bonuses or raises in salary but also through incentives such as promotion (Minbaeva, 2008). Intrinsically motivated people on the other hand, can find satisfaction in their job performance (Minbaeva, 2008).

There are findings showing that HRM practises which aim to extrinsically motivate employees directly affects knowledge transfer (Minbaeva, 2008; Minbaeva et al., 2012), as well as indirectly through governance mechanisms and knowledge-sharing hostility (Husted et al., 2012). The findings on intrinsic motivation and how it plays along with factors such as cooperative climate, perceptions of organisational commitment and job design have, however, resulted in varied outcomes in relation to knowledge transfer (Foss et al., 2009; Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva et al., 2012). More recent studies which are still at an early stage have looked at configurations of HRM practises, which means that they investigate how several practises work together to affect motivation to transfer knowledge (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016; Foss et al., 2015). One example of a configuration of practises are rewards, non-controlling job design and supportive work climate (Foss et al., 2015). Studying how several practises work together is argued to be important (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). This because employees are not only exposed to one isolated HRM practice but rather several practises which make up the HRM system.

Inconclusive results in combination with an under researched area urges for more studies on the connection between HRM and knowledge transfer (Michailova & Mustaffa, 2012). This is also motivated by limitations within existing research, e.g. in Minbaeva’s work (2007 & 2008) the hypotheses are tested through a web-based survey on a single respondent per subsidiary unit which brings up the question if the respondent can answer for the whole subsidiary and if the
web-survey is able to capture nuances in employee motivation. In general, most researchers studying motivation and knowledge transfer (not only within the HRM perspective) have seen motivation as a subsidiary level characteristic and resulted in inconclusive findings (e.g. Cruz et al., 2009; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Jensen & Szulanski, 2004; Minbaeva, 2007, 2008).

As a response, it has been argued that subsidiary level studies (macro level) are unable to capture motivational diversity among employees (Felin & Hesterly, 2007; Minbaeva et al., 2009) since motivation is something highly individual and not a characteristic of the subsidiary (Michailova & Mustaffa, 2012). Michailova and Mustaffa (2012) therefore, suggest that an individual level approach would allow greater insight into the sender and receiver (micro level) and this will provide an understanding of the varying results. More recent studies on HRM and knowledge transfer have as a response to the research gap focused on a micro perspective with the individuals at focus rather than the subsidiary, although, it is argued that more studies are needed (e.g. Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva et al., 2012).

Moreover, there is an over-representation of studies made in a quantitative manner within the field. Michailova and Mustaffa (2012) therefore urge for more qualitative studies since they consider context sensitive factors, contribute with detailed and rich descriptions as well as a greater understanding of the sender and receiver. Minbaeva et al. (2009) also call for inductive qualitative studies that can be used to theorise factors and relations that have not been discovered yet, so that they in the future can build new variables. They suggest doing a Small Number study which would allow more in-depth analysis.

To meet the critique and suggestions for future research, our contribution will be to investigate the relationship between HRM practises and employee motivation to share knowledge at a micro level (the individuals), which is still an under researched area (Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva et al., 2012). This will be done in a qualitative manner due to the urge for enriched details and consideration of context-sensitive factors impacting employee motivation (Michailova & Mustaffa, 2012; Minbaeva et al., 2009). Further, this study will focus solely on the sender, as focusing on both the sender and receiver might compromise the possibilities to get deeper insights and details at an individual level. Unlike the studies mentioned in the introduction we will focus on a single company which will allow us to see possible motivational differences between employees exposed to the same HRM system.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between HRM practises and employee motivation to share knowledge with employees at other units. An important part of the purpose is to consider the whole HRM system, instead of focusing on a few isolated HRM practises which much of the prior research have done (E.g. Foss et al., 2009; Husted et al., 2012; Minbaeva, 2008). Further, as motivation varies in individuals and might influence knowledge sharing in different ways, we argue that a qualitative micro approach will help us to in depth explore the ways HRM influences individual motivation and its possible subsequent effect on knowledge sharing behaviour.

1.4 Research question

*How do HRM practises influence subsidiary employees’ intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge with employees at other units?*
2.0 Theory

This chapter contains five sections. The first section includes a presentation of knowledge transfer narrowed down into knowledge sharing. The second section goes through the motivational theory of Self-Determination followed by HRM and its connection to motivation. The fourth section contains a review of studies connecting knowledge transfer and HRM with motivation as the mediating factor. Finally, the last section illustrates the connection in a conceptual model.

2.1 Knowledge transfer

As described in the problem statement, this thesis will investigate motivation to share knowledge at a micro level. When studying at an individual level it becomes important to understand the distinction between knowledge transfer, knowledge sharing and knowledge receiving. Szulanski (1996, 2003) describes knowledge transfer as a process where an exchange occurs between the sender and receiver. Knowledge sharing and receiving are on the other hand behavioural approaches on a personalised level, and are elements of knowledge transfer (Tangaraja et al., 2016). However, to not entirely separate knowledge sharing from the bigger context, an introduction to knowledge transfer will be provided before focusing on knowledge sharing.

Similar to other researchers that have taken an interest in the knowledge-based perspective, Kogut and Zander (1992) suggest that knowledge transfer is a fundamental part of the existence of the firm. Organisations that are efficient at transferring knowledge that is hard to imitate (often knowledge that is less understood or novel) will have an advantage over competitors. Murray and Peyrefitte (2007) define knowledge transfer as when one unit (e.g. department, group, individual) is affected by the experiences of another unit. What type of knowledge that is transferred is argued to impact the knowledge transfer process (Grant, 1996; Minbaeva, 2007). Characteristics of the knowledge are often divided into tacit and explicit knowledge (Grant, 1996). Explicit knowledge can be coded and written down, consequently also easy to transfer (Grant, 1996). Tacit knowledge on the other hand cannot be coded; it is stored within the individuals of a firm, as know-how, and is more difficult to transfer (Grant, 1996). When tacit knowledge is transferred, it requires more effort and time (Minbaeva, 2007).
Characteristics of the context has also been proven to influence the knowledge transfer process (Szulanski, 1996). This is partly referred to how supportive the organisational climate is of the transfer process (Szulanski, 1996), and the relationship between the sender and receiver (Minbaeva, 2007). The context can also be described as how the firm is organised and what intra-firm systems the organisation uses (Szulanski, 1996). To enable knowledge transfer there should exist opportunities for communication across units and a system that makes it possible to share knowledge (Minbaeva, 2007). Research into communication channels has shown that the more extensive network and communications links between employees across units, the more knowledge is transferred (Minbaeva, 2007). In the last decades, IT-systems have become important knowledge management tools for companies (Ciabuschi, 2005). It has also been called an “information era” as a large amount of information has been made available through advanced IT-systems (Klausegger et al., 2007). This will be discussed in connection to motivation to share knowledge in the following section.

2.1.1 Knowledge sharing behaviour

Minbaeva (2007) suggests that characteristics impacting the sender are ability and willingness to send knowledge. The ability of the sender includes the capability to express and communicate knowledge (Minbaeva, 2007). The willingness to share knowledge is contingent on motivation (Minbaeva, 2007), which as mentioned has been a characteristic of interest among many researchers (e.g. Cruz et al., 2009; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Jensen & Szulanski, 2004; Szulanski, 1996). Ciabuschi (2005) argues that motivation is a crucial factor for knowledge sharing to take place. Lack of motivation might depend on the fear of losing a privileged position, ownership or superiority (Szulanski, 1996). Senders lack of motivation might also depend on insufficient rewards in contrast to the resources put into the transfer (Szulanski, 1996).

As IT-systems have become an important tool for companies to manage knowledge, challenges connected to motivation to share knowledge have become more evident. When exposed to IT-systems that contain huge amounts of information, employees can feel overwhelmed and sometimes discouraged to share knowledge, as it might feel fruitless (Whelan & Teigland, 2013). This along with the fact that employees might feel discouraged when there at times is no apparent receiver for their knowledge (Ciabuschi, 2005). Consequently, motivation becomes
important in order to get employees to use these systems and to share knowledge across the whole MNC. The following section will go deeper into motivation and present the motivational theory of Self-Determination and why it is relevant to knowledge sharing behaviour.

2.2 Motivational theory

Theories of motivation are argued to be relevant to knowledge sharing behaviour due to the assumptions that knowledge sharing behaviour is similar to voluntary behaviour (e.g. prosocial behaviour and helping) (Frey, 1993; Gagne, 2009). The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been argued to be a good predictor of knowledge sharing behaviour at an individual level, as it assumes that different types of motivation impact individual behaviour differently (Minbaeva, 2013). Ryan and Deci (2000) agree that various factors need to be considered when it comes to what motivates people, since it depends on experiences and is highly individual. The following section will present the motivational theory of Self-Determination more closely.

2.2.1 Self-determination theory

Ajzen (1991) argues that the behaviour of individuals depends on motivational factors which in turn are rooted in intentions. This argument also assumes that the degree of intention matters to the likeliness of a certain behaviour to happen, therefore, the greater the intention the greater the motivation to perform a certain behaviour. However, Sheldon and Elliot (1998) argue that another dimension must be added to the assumption, the performance of the behaviour will not only depend on the intentions but also on the reason for engaging in the behaviour, which is inherent in each individual. The SDT, therefore, divides motivation into autonomous and controlled motivation which is similar to the division of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Minbaeva (2008) and Osterloh et al. (2002) argue that the reason why previous studies have shown inconsistent results is because motivation has been studied as a whole, and not been divided into intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation. Dividing these two supports the urge from researchers that a refined division of the characteristic motivation is needed, since the reason of engaging in a certain behaviour will impact the type of motivation and in turn the outcome.

Autonomous motivation is when a person feels that he or she has a choice of acting on their own accord (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Intrinsic motivation is a part of autonomous motivation; to
deepen the reasoning about intrinsic motivation it can be explained as when people do something because it is in line with their personal goals and identities, which are shaped by experiences and surrounding environment (Gagné & Deci, 2005). When it comes to controlled motivation, people feel pressured to act in a certain way and it is not voluntary (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Important is that both autonomous and controlled motivation make people act intentionally and can be contrasted against amotivation, which is when people are not motivated (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Extrinsic motivation can, according to Gagné and Deci (2005), be both autonomous- and controlled motivation. This because extrinsic motivation can be controlled motivation when the task is not of interest to the person performing it. Therefore, there is a need for external motivation, either a reward for doing it or a negative consequence for not doing it. When an external regulation become internalised, meaning that individuals take on attitudes or values, extrinsic motivation falls into autonomous motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). As the behaviour that previously needed external motivation has become ingrained in the person’s behaviour and aligned with self-selected goals. Consequently, there is no longer a need for rewards or consequences to perform the task (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

This theory shows that it is important to divide motivation, as different HRM practises can influence different types of motivation and result in different actions. Many of the empirical studies in the field of HRM and knowledge transfer, use the distinction of intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation rather than autonomous- and controlled motivation (e.g. Husted et al., 2012; Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva et al., 2012). However, many of these studies are based on SDT. This thesis will also use the distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation so it can build on the previous studies in the field.

2.3 HRM

2.3.1 Introduction HRM

Research in the last decades has agreed that HRM is important when it comes to the performance of a company (Huselid, 1995; Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Wright & McMahan, 1992). HRM is by Lado and Wilson (1994, pp. 701) defined as: a set of distinct but interrelated activities, functions, and processes that are directed at attracting, developing and maintaining (or disposing of) a firm's human resources. The fundamental task of HRM is to manage human
capital and therefore, also the assets of knowledge inherent in individuals (Minbaeva et al., 2009). Knowledge capital and flows are therefore influenced by HRM practises such as career development, feedback, training and job design (Minbaeva et al., 2009). According to the resource-based theory, employees can sustain the competitive advantage of a company through individual performance and thereby affect firm level outcomes (Huselid, 1995). As already argued, many companies do not utilize HRM tools to their full extent, which means that employees are not fulfilling their potential (Huselid, 1995). Therefore, if companies properly use HRM practises to motivate their employees, they will reach higher levels of performance. Also, as mentioned in connection to SDT, different types of motivation require different incentives and practises, which will be explained further in the following section.

2.3.2 HRM practises and extrinsic motivation

To extrinsically motivate employees to perform in a desired way can, according to Minbaeva (2008), be done through reward systems that recognises individual job contributions. Compensation systems that influence extrinsic motivation may consist of; bonuses, salary, and paid-for education (Minbaeva, 2008). To successfully manage such compensation system Deci (1975) argues that the compensations must be given exponentially as employees put more effort and improve performance. However, for this to work as a motivator, external control mechanisms should be present to track the performances (Deci, 1975). Another way to extrinsically motivate is through feedback, as this will give the employee an external goal to fulfil and their actions will be controlled by the desire for good feedback (Foss et al., 2009). Extrinsic motivation has been argued to have a less desired effect on performance than intrinsic motivation, as it is controlled and employees may only perform the tasks that will lead to a reward but do not act voluntarily (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

2.3.3 HRM practises and intrinsic motivation

In many cases performance- based incentive systems are not sufficient to motivate employees to do their job effectively (Minbaeva, 2008). It has been argued that a superior type of motivation is intrinsic motivation. This is due to the emotional commitment and the pride the employee feels when effectively executing their job that is aligned with the organisational goals (Vroom & Deci, 1970). HRM practises that aim to intrinsically motivate should therefore be focused on developing employee self-actualisation, self-control and self-regulation (Minbaeva, 2008). This is theorised to be done through flexible work hours, job design (Minbaeva, 2008),
training, career development and opportunities for growth (Husted et al., 2012). In their study, Osterloh et al. (2002), showed that intrinsically motivated employees were to prefer over extrinsically motivated ones, since they were associated with higher degrees of creativity and knowledge transfer. Although, the benefits with intrinsic motivation seem to be many, it is not easy to manage in a direct way (Minbaeva, 2008). The next section will present studies made on HRM practises and knowledge sharing behaviour with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as the mediating factors.

2.4 Connecting HRM and knowledge transfer

Researchers connecting the HRM field with knowledge transfer is not a novelty (e.g. Lado & Wilson, 1994; Pucik, 1988), however, Minbaeva (2008) argues that former researchers have missed the mediating link that connects the two fields together, which is motivation. This is also supported by Felin and Hesterly (2007) and Llopis and Foss (2016), although Minbaeva (2005, 2007, 2008) has been by far the most active researcher in the field. In 2008, Minbaeva found empirical support for a connection between HRM practises influencing extrinsic motivation and increased knowledge sharing. However, in the same study, no significant connection was found between intrinsic motivation and knowledge sharing (Minbaeva, 2008). Nonetheless, she argued that this might be due to the measurements used or the limitations in the sampling. To note is that the study was made on a subsidiary level where managers answered for the whole subsidiary.

2.4.1 Macro level vs. micro level studies

As argued in the introduction there has more recently been an urge for studies at a micro level as macro level studies have not allowed variations among individuals to come forward, which has been argued to be crucial when investigating motivation (Minbaeva, 2005 & 2008; Minbaeva et al., 2012). Adopting an individual level perspective would in that way reveal possible motivational heterogeneity among employees (Felin & Hesterly, 2007; Minbaeva et al., 2009). Minbaeva et al. (2012) examined the relationship between HRM practises that affect extrinsic motivation and the extent of knowledge sharing at a micro level, and found that it had a direct effect, as the macro level studies also had found. They further studied the individuals’ perceptions of organisational commitment to knowledge sharing which was also found to have a direct effect on the extent of knowledge sharing. It was theorised that a strong HRM system
can signal organisational values to the employees (Minbaeva et al., 2012). If the individuals perceive that the organisation values knowledge sharing it could motivate them to engage in this activity and thereby it builds a strong organisational climate (Minbaeva et al., 2012). They also found that intrinsic motivation and engagement in social activity facilitated the relationship between perceptions of organisational commitment and the extent of knowledge sharing (Minbaeva et al., 2012). These results indicated that intrinsic motivation (although indirectly) can affect knowledge sharing behaviour, which was not found when studying at a macro level.

### 2.4.2 Connecting different HRM practises with motivation to share knowledge

Researchers within the knowledge management field have investigated how governance mechanism affect knowledge sharing (Husted et al., 2012). This is relevant to this study since governance practises are closely related with HRM as they overlap and deal with the same issues (Minbaeva, 2008). Husted et al. (2012) studied how practises such as job design, training, development programs, compensations systems and organisational structures affected individuals negative attitude and tendency to reject or hoard knowledge. This is called knowledge-sharing hostility, which can be related to amotivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Husted et al. (2012) found that commitment-based mechanisms which encourage knowledge sharing decreases knowledge-sharing hostility. Commitment-based mechanisms falls into the category of HRM practises that attempt to increase intrinsic motivation through creating trust and loyalty to the organisation as well make the employees act voluntarily (Husted et al., 2012). Transaction-based mechanisms are more explicit ways to incentivise knowledge sharing, through e.g. financial rewards and promotion. It was shown that these increased the extent of knowledge-sharing hostility through increased hoarding (Husted et al., 2012). What these results indicate are that to reduce knowledge-sharing hostility, organisations need to try to affect employees to be intrinsically motivated (Husted et al., 2012).

In a more recent article, Llopis and Foss (2016) claim that the connection between HRM and knowledge-sharing behaviour is still under researched. The authors approached the subject by examining the connection between cooperative climate, job autonomy and intrinsic motivation at a micro level. It was theorised that a cooperative climate presupposes social interactions within the organisation and in turn leads to more knowledge sharing (Llopis & Foss, 2016; Reinholt et al., 2011). A cooperative climate can also be viewed as a set of norms of an organisation that individuals feel inclined to follow (Llopis & Foss, 2016). This can be related
to what Minbaeva et al., (2012) state about HRM systems ability to signal values and norms. What Llopis and Foss’s (2016) research found was that a cooperative climate can be a way to motivate knowledge sharing behaviour among employees, however, they suggest that this does not apply evenly to everyone. For intrinsically motivated employees a cooperative climate does not act as a further motivator as they are already motivated by the task itself (Llopis & Foss, 2016).

Their findings also indicate that autonomous job design has a positive mediating effect between a cooperative climate and knowledge sharing (Llopis & Foss, 2016). Other studies have also investigated the direct relationship between job design and intrinsic motivation to share knowledge (Foss et al., 2009; Minbaeva, 2008). However, Minbaeva (2008) did not find significant support for the relationship while Foss et al.’s quantitative micro level study (2009) found that there is a connection between job design and intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. Intrinsic motivation had in their study the strongest positive effect on knowledge sharing compared to the other types of motivation they studied. They also studied the motivating effects of feedback, which falls under the HRM practices of job design, and found that it increased employees’ external motivation to share knowledge. External motivation which can be substituted for extrinsic motivation, was in that study found to have a negative effect on the extent of knowledge sharing (Foss et al., 2009). As employees may only share knowledge to the extent they are required to get positive feedback and act strategically (Foss et al., 2009). As feedback and autonomous job design were found to motivate in different ways, it is important to study the different aspects of job design separately. In sum, what the studies above confirm is that different HRM practises affect different types of motivation, and need to be considered when developing HRM systems.

2.4.3 Configurations of HRM practises

Research in the area has been advancing when it comes to specific isolated HRM practises impact on motivation to share knowledge, however, more recent studies suggest that the configuration of practises are as important and might be the reason for contradicting results (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016; Foss et al., 2015). Foss et al. (2015) argue that rewards, non-controlling job design and supportive work climate are a configuration of HRM practises that work together to evoke autonomous motivation to share knowledge. The configuration of HRM practises is called internal fit and the idea is that employees are exposed to several HRM
practises at the same time (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). Configurations that are consistent with the message they communicate are more effective than if the message is inconsistent (Foss et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important that the HRM practises part of a configuration are internally aligned (Foss et al., 2015).

In Foss et al.’s (2015) study it was theorised that an autonomous job design and a supportive climate would give the employees a sense of self-determination, and in turn the employees would interpret rewards as informational rather than controlling (Foss et al., 2015). What category a reward falls into depends on how the individual perceives the reward, which in turn is dependent on the context and nature of the reward. Therefore, an employee with an autonomous job design and supportive climate will interpret the reward as informational as the decision to transfer knowledge is voluntary, and the employee will not feel controlled into sharing knowledge. Foss et al. (2015) found support for an internal fit between the practises and the result indicate that it is important to look at all the HRM practises an employee is exposed to in order to know if they are internally aligned to motivate.

Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) agree with Foss et al. (2015) that it is necessary to look at combinations of HRM practices rather than just focusing on a single isolated practise. According to SDT external rewards are anticipated to interfere with intrinsic motivation, and in turn influence knowledge sharing negatively (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). However, Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) argue that it is not certain that intrinsically motivated employees are affected negatively by rewards systems, rather it also depends on other factors such as job design and type of reward (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). This is in line with Foss et al. (2015) as they argue that rewards can be interpreted differently depending on the other HRM practises employees are exposed to.

Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) also found that opportunities to share knowledge affected employee motivation. When employees had many opportunities to share knowledge, intrinsic motivation had a positive effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). When few opportunities existed, extrinsic motivation had a positive effect on knowledge sharing behaviour (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). Therefore, Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) claim contrary to previous research, that high levels of intrinsic motivation do not always enhance knowledge sharing behaviour.
2.5 Conceptual framework

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) summarises the different parts from the literature review, and combines them in a conceptual model. Several HRM practises have been shown to affect knowledge sharing motivation; job design, rewards, career development and the organisational climate promoted through the HRM system. This represents the first part of the conceptual model called the HRM system. This study will investigate practises that are present in the case company and how these, and the configuration of them, influence employee motivation to share knowledge.

Motivation is divided into extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation based on the SDT explained by Gagné and Deci (2005). The SDT will be used when analysing the interview data to determine the respondents type of motivation. Some of the studies have shown that HRM practises that influence extrinsically can interfere with intrinsic motivation, it is therefore important to view the interaction between the two types of motivation. This represents the middle part of the conceptual model called intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge. Further, this section is included in the micro level of the model as this study investigates the motivation at an individual level (the employee).

The third section in the conceptual model is called knowledge sharing. This part represents the actual knowledge sharing performed by the employee, it aims to find out and confirm that knowledge sharing has occurred. The type of knowledge that is shared by the employee is considered in this section, as it might impact the way the knowledge sharing occurs (Grant, 1996). Knowledge sharing is also included in the micro level aspect, this because knowledge sharing is a behavioural approach on a personalised level (Tangaraja et al., 2016).

In the conceptual model the organisational context is also considered, as it is shown to influence the process of knowledge transfer (Szulanski, 1996), and therefore also knowledge sharing. Factors included in the Organisational context which are shown to influence knowledge transfer are; Organisational climate (Szulanski, 1996), Communication channels (Minbaeva, 2007), Relationship between sender and receiver (Minbaeva, 2007) and Intra-firm system (Szulanski, 1996). The organisational context in the conceptual model, not only covers knowledge sharing but also the HRM system and the motivation parts. This because it is argued by Minbaeva et al.
that the HRM system can signal norms and values which in turn impact the organisational climate. We have chosen to do the same with the other aspects of the organisational context as well, as they might facilitate the knowledge transfer process. Therefore, also have a possible impact on the relationship between HRM, motivation and knowledge sharing. Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) for example found that when intrinsically motivated people had many communication channels to share knowledge it had a positive effect on knowledge-sharing behaviour.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework
3.0 Methodology

This chapter begins with explaining the reasoning and choices behind how this study was conducted. The following section will present the case company, the data collection process, operationalisation and how the data were analysed. The chapter ends with a discussion about the quality of the study.

3.1 Research method & design

In response to the limitations of former research this study uses a micro perspective to investigate how HRM practices motivate individual employees to share knowledge. Gaining detailed insight and understanding of the perspectives of the respondents has therefore been crucial when answering the research question. It was made possible by using a qualitative approach (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010) which contrasts with former quantitative research within the field.

As a starting point the study builds on the limited existing notions in the literature. This is done while having an inherent openness to the perspectives of the respondents, which provided opportunities for contributing with new insights. This is also called an abductive approach, which uses inductive logic by seeing the world from the respondents’ view, however, unlike induction it is based on theoretical understanding of the context of the respondents (Bryman, 2012). A challenge encountered during this study was to keep a healthy balance between having an open mind to new factors in order to build further on the previous research, without being too lead by it. Most of the previous research have been quantitative and therefore used quantitative measurements. Another challenge consisted of creating broad and open questions without being leading, that could capture the perspective of the respondents. These challenges were handled by doing one pilot interview and two test interviews which allowed us to work and elaborate the questions until we they were satisfying. Further, when using qualitative questions to collect data it is important to keep in mind that qualitative approaches often are criticised of being too subjective as it gives the researcher freedom to evaluate what is of importance in the data (Bryman, 2012). However, it was still seen as an appropriate approach as one of the main contribution of this study was the micro perspective which required going into details and collecting data in a qualitative manner.
3.2 Research strategy – single case study

The aim of this study was to get in-depth understanding and to explore new theoretical implications, which could be in disagreement with- or an addition to the current theories within the HRM and knowledge transfer field. A case study strategy was therefore, suitable as it allows this exploration (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991) and is a preferred method when investigating contemporary phenomena in its context (Farquhar, 2012). Further, by using a single case approach it allowed this research to investigate employees exposed to the same HRM system and context. This was relevant since it made it possible to explore variations in motivation among employees exposed to the same HRM practises and what the reason behind the variations might be.

This study uses a representative case which means that the case company chosen is not extreme or unusual (Bryman, 2012). As this is an abductive study, it was appropriate to use a representative case as it allowed the previous literature to be relevant in the case. Further, a single case study which is also exploratory, as in this study, can provide theoretical propositions that can be investigated in broader studies in the future (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010).

This study aims to generalise the findings towards theory, therefore it is not of great importance that the results cannot be removed from its context, which is a common criticism towards case studies (Farquhar, 2012). Moreover, as this study aimed to get an in depth understanding of the phenomena, the thesis authors got an increased understanding and involvement in the context during the study. To consider is to what extent this could lead to the research being subjective, which is another common criticism of case study research (Farquhar, 2012).

3.2.1 Company of examination

The company examined is an MNC that has more than 60,000 employees and a high international presence, with HQ in Europe. It is structured into different business areas, which in turn are divided into units. The studied company values innovation, and the link between research and application of new technology is highly prioritised. The ability to fast and efficiently turn innovative ideas to practise is an important part in providing the best possible solutions to customers. Due to the knowledge intensive activities, this company was relevant to this study. Further, the company uses various intra-firm systems supporting knowledge transfer which are common for the whole company. More details about the company and their intra-
firm systems will be presented in the empirical findings. Worth mentioning is that the authors of this thesis, in preparation of the study, read about the case company and gained an understanding of the structure and how it operates. This helped to determine that the company suited the aim of the study.

3.2.2 Sampling

The respondents were chosen based on a convenience selection, which means that interviews were made with employees that were given by a contact person at the case company (Bryman, 2008). The contact was a person we knew from earlier, and who reached out to colleagues and asked if they were willing to do an interview with us. Only people that had shared knowledge with another unit were asked since this was a criterion for taking part in the interviews. In total, 10 interviews were conducted. The respondents worked at units in Europe, predominantly (8/10) in the same country. Further, all the respondents had to do some type of knowledge sharing as a part of their job, see table 1 for full respondents list.

We strived for a larger variation in the sample, however, after various attempts no success was reached on that point. This can therefore be considered as a limitation, as the majority of respondents were in a similar age group and had been working at the case company approximately the same length of time. The findings are therefore not generalizable to the whole company, as age may impact how knowledge sharing is viewed and how accustomed they are to using technology to communicate. This is important to consider since it impacts the validity, which concerns the integrity of the results (Bryman, 2012). However, some kind of empirical saturation was achieved within the group of employees that we had access to, which was why 10 interviewees were decided to be sufficient. Lastly, as this study aims to research individual motivation, the results are still of interest as they can be used to theorise the relationship between HRM and knowledge sharing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years at the case company</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>IT Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Development Consultant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>IT project Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Development Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Business Analyst</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>IT adviser</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>IT Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Business Analyst</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>IT Business Analyst</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. List of respondents

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Survey

Before the interviews an information letter, including an introduction to the topic of the study, was sent out to the respondents together with a qualitative survey (see Appendix I.). The purpose of the information letter was to inform the respondents about the topic and to confirm that the respondents fit into the criteria. The survey was sent out so that more straightforward questions could be asked beforehand, such as background information and descriptions of the respondents’ job arrangements. In case studies, different data collection methods are often combined (Farquhar, 2012). This approached saved time and allowed us to go deeper and handle more complex questions during the interviews. This was to prefer as most of the respondents had limited amount of time for the interviews. However, to consider is that the information letter and survey which was sent out beforehand could affect the respondents’ answers as they had time to think about the topic. Meaning that they had time to think it through and possibly answer what they think was more appropriate instead of answering spontaneously.

3.3.2 Semi structured interviews

After the qualitative survey, semi structured interviews were held. This type of interview allowed us to follow pre-selected themes and questions (Denscombe, 2009). However, as there is an inherent flexibility in the semi structured approach there was room to let the respondents develop thoughts and ideas outside the frame of the interview guide (Denscombe, 2009). This data collection approach was to prefer since the theoretical framework and previous studies contributed with already studied topics and research questions. These were the starting points.
and because of the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, we could talk around these topics and be open to new data.

A pilot interview was performed to learn how long the interviews would be and to see whether the questions asked provided useful information that could give an answer to the research question (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The pilot interviewee was not an employee at the case company, however, it was a person that worked internationally. After the pilot interview, some questions were changed or modified to ensure that the questions were clearer. Following the pilot interview two test interviews were held with the respondents from the case company. These were performed to make sure that the gathered data covered all the topics and aspects needed to answer the research question. After these interviews, adjustments of the questions were made to improve the natural flow of the questions as well as the wording. However, the gathered data from the two test interviews covered the topics even after the adjustments, so they did not need to be complemented with further data.

The interviews were between 30 and 60 minutes long. Since the qualitative survey was sent out beforehand all the questions during the interview could be discussed thoroughly in a good pace for 30-60 minutes depending on how talkative the respondents were. The interviews were held over skype or phone in a closed room, at Sollentuna library or Uppsala University library, so that the privacy of the respondents was respected. As the interviews had no video, to consider is to what extent it might have hindered visual cues from being noted by the interviewer (Bryman, 2012). The reason to why the video function could not be used during the skype interviews was that our “private” skype was not able to do video calls with skype for “business”. Moreover, due to geographical distance face to face interviews could not be held. The time span when the interviews were held was between March 6th, 2018 and May 7th, 2018. Further, there was a primary interviewer for each interview while the other thesis author took notes. The thesis author taking notes had the opportunity to ask additional questions at the end of the interview in response to what was discussed.
3.4 Operationalisation

3.4.1 Survey

The survey had two sections, Background Information and Human Resource Management (see Appendix I. for the full survey). In the background information, there were questions such as job title, time at the case company and age. These questions were asked so that the thesis authors would understand the profile of the respondents. The section on Human Resource Management contained four questions, these questions were designed to find out about the HRM system and practises at the firm. Each survey question (excluding background questions) and their operationalisation from theory are summarised in table 2 below. The first column explains what the question aims to capture and what part it is connected to in the conceptual model, in the second column the questions are presented and the third column states what articles the questions were derived from.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Captures</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(autonomy) and variation in daily work.</td>
<td>a) In terms of flexibility in scheduling your day to day work and tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) In terms of variation in the tasks you perform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of HRM system in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career development:</td>
<td>2) How would you describe your opportunities within career development?</td>
<td>Minbaeva (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to personal growth and self-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>actualisation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of HRM system in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational climate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborations within the organisation and open</td>
<td>workers’ and their managers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication regardless hierarchies.</td>
<td>a) How would you describe the collaboration between different units?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Organisational climate &amp; culture: Cross</td>
<td>b) How does your organisation communicate their views on knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unit collaboration.</td>
<td>sharing, and what are their views?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Perceived organisational commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of organisational context in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the system and extrinsic motivation.</td>
<td>a) How do you perceive this system?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of HRM system in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Operationalisation Survey
The questions in the interviews were based on previous research presented in the theory section, which were all quantitative studies. Therefore, the questions were adjusted to be open ended and more suitable in a qualitative study. The questions were worded to not be leading, for instance in question 7 the word “reason” was used in the first question instead of motivation to avoid being leading, as the word motivation would assume that the respondent already was motivated, when there could be no motivation behind the knowledge sharing. The following table 3 summarises how the questions were elaborated from theory (see Appendix II. for the full interview guide).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Captures</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards knowledge sharing (extrinsic or intrinsic motivation).</td>
<td>1) What do you think of knowledge sharing?</td>
<td>Minbaeva (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of knowledge sharing in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents perception of organisational climate that supports knowledge sharing.</td>
<td>2) You described the organisational climate as XX in the survey. a) How do you feel that it impacts knowledge sharing between units? b) How does this impact the way you share knowledge?</td>
<td>Foss et al. (2015) Husted et al. (2012) Llopis &amp; Foss (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of organisational context in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If knowledge had been shared with other units. The scope of the shared knowledge and if the knowledge had been received by a counterpart. The relationship between the sender and receiver.</td>
<td>3) Can you describe one significant occasion or project when you shared knowledge with another unit a) With how many people or units did you share the knowledge with? b) After sharing the knowledge, how did the other unit or people respond? c) Have you shared knowledge with this unit or people before?</td>
<td>Murray &amp; Peyrefitte (2007) Minbaeva (2007) Szulanski (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of organisational context and knowledge sharing in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the knowledge was tacit or explicit.</td>
<td>4) Could you describe what type of knowledge you shared?</td>
<td>Grant (1996) Minbaeva (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of knowledge sharing in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to knowledge sharing, how they did arise and were handled.</td>
<td>5) Can you describe any obstacles you may have encountered when sharing the knowledge?</td>
<td>Andreeva &amp; Sergeeva (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of organisational context in the conceptual model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents perception about communication channels/intra-firm systems which impact opportunities to share knowledge.</td>
<td>6) Describe different ways to share knowledge within your organisation (E.g. Regular meetings or IT systems) a) How are they used? b) What do you think about these ways to share knowledge?</td>
<td>Andreeva &amp; Sergeeva (2016) Minbaeva (2007) Szulanski (1996)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Captures if the respondents were intrinsically- or extrinsically motivated to share the knowledge.
*Part of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the conceptual model.*

7) Describe your reasons behind sharing knowledge with the other unit in the example
   a) Can you come up with other reasons to why you shared the knowledge?
   b) Why are these reasons important to you?
   c) Would you say that these reasons are what normally motivates you to share knowledge? if no, describe why and what the reasons are

---

Attitude towards the performance management system and rewards as encouragement. If the respondent is extrinsically motivated.
*Part of the HRM system and intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation in the conceptual model.*

8) How do you feel about the performance management system?
   a) How do you feel about rewards as encouragement?

---

Captures if job design motivates the respondents and if it impacts how they share knowledge.
*Part of the HRM system and intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation in the conceptual model.*

9) How important do you find the structure of your job is? referring to flexibility, independence and task variety
   a) How does the structure of your job impact how you share knowledge?

---

Captures how important career development is to the respondents and if it motivates them. Further if it impacts how the respondents performs and share knowledge.
*Part of the HRM system and intrinsic/ extrinsic motivation in the conceptual model.*

10) How important do you find that opportunities within career development are and why?
    a) How does opportunities for career development impact your performance?
    b) How does it impact your knowledge sharing with other units?

---

Captures if there are any important practises at the case company that have not been covered in our literature review and questions.

11) Are there any HR practices at your firm that we haven’t mentioned that you have encountered?
    a) What do you think about this/these practises?

---

Finds out what HRM practises the respondent personally perceives as encouraging. Further if the respondents perceive the practises differently or if they are equally encouraging.
*Part of the HRM system in the conceptual model.*

12) Are there any HR practises we have talked about that you feel are more or less encouraging? Why?

---

| Table 3. Operationalisation Interview guide |

To conclude, the interview and survey questions will together provide data to answer our research question. How the data were analysed is presented in the next section.
3.5 Method of analysis

To analyse the transcribed interview data and qualitative survey answers the transcripts were read through several times to get an understanding of the topics discussed in the interviews. The transcripts were then coded using descriptive coding. It helped to understand the basic topics in the data so that further analysis could be made on its content in the subsequent step of the analysis (Saldaña, 2009). An example of how this was done is presented in table 4 below. After coding all the interview data, it became apparent what the most talked about topics were. These topics were then analysed as themes in the next step of the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 8: “I’m lucky to have a manager that let me do everything that I find important, of course you have touch point throughout the week. But in the end, you know, as long as I complete the deal and can explain why I’m leaving one thing unfinished to work on another thing it is okay. He trusts my reasoning and if he finds out by others that we have to change priorities he tells me to do so.”</td>
<td>Job Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 9: “I feel I have a lot of opportunities which I am getting via people who I talk to. So, to give you an example now I am applying for a role which I am kind of applying via my network so not really using the official channels. Similarly, with multiple kind of mentoring or network, different networks activities, I mostly find out about those via the people I know.”</td>
<td>Career Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Descriptive coding

Thematic analysis is one of the most common methods when analysing qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). A matrix was made of each theme, where sub themes and quotes from the interviews were placed under the correct sub-theme and interviewee (Bryman, 2012). Once this was done the data were more manageable and further analysis could be made on the themes. Below in table 5, is an example of how Career Development was thematically analysed. For the full table with all the respondents see Appendix III. Career Development was chosen as the example, as this theme was the most suitable in terms of confidential information as many of the other themes would require more redaction of information.
Table 5. Example of Thematic analysis of Career Development

As this is an abductive study next step in the analysis was to relate the findings back to the theory. The themes provided a way of comparing the respondents’ perceptions on their HRM system, knowledge sharing and their motivation. Comparing our findings to the theory allowed us to see if they corresponded and in what ways. Furthermore, we could see if themes that had not been previously researched had been found, or if we had findings that contradicted previous research. This laid the basis for our theoretical contributions.

3.6 Research quality

Qualitative studies are difficult to separate from their social setting (Bryman, 2012), thereby, it is important to be transparent and clear on how the research has been executed. To approach this, also referred to as external reliability (Bryman, 2012), the method section describes in detail how the data collection was performed and the method of analysis that was used. Further, to approach external reliability and validity the survey and interview guide are presented in the Appendix, as well as a thoroughly explained operationalisation. However, to consider is that the questions are operationalised from former quantitative studies. Although the thesis authors have been careful to not be to lead by it, it should be considered if it unconsciously has limited
the authors to keep an open mind to new input at times. As the data collection was open and only followed certain topics it was important to be clear on how the questions were asked and why. To consider is that the thesis authors during the study gained more understanding of the case company and follow up questions might have been steered by that knowledge, which is difficult to replicate. Moreover, to approach internal reliability, which is that both authors agree upon the understanding and conclusions drawn from the collected data (Bryman, 2012). Both thesis authors were always present during the interviews to make sure that the interviews were perceived in the same way, further when the data were analysed the authors did a common interpretation of the data.

In case studies, it is common to use triangulation of data sources as it confirms the findings and improves construct validity (Farquhar, 2012). The case company did not provide materials with details about their HRM system and knowledge sharing activities. These topics were covered in the survey and interviews, however, they were the subjective views of the respondents. The authors did research about the company to get an understanding of the company context (e.g. webpage and reports published online). Information from these sources could, however, not be used due to the anonymity.

### 3.7 Ethics

During the study four important aspects of ethics were considered; voluntary, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity (Bryman, 2008). To ensure informed participation consent (Farquhar, 2012), the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and that it was voluntary to participate. Further, all respondents were asked before the interview if they agreed to be recorded.

Due to legal reasons the company name could not be revealed in this thesis and therefore the company and respondents remain anonymous. The collected data and information about the respondents were handled with confidentiality and only accessed by the thesis authors.
4.0 Empirical findings & analysis

This chapter contains empirical findings from the survey and interviews. The findings are in the end of each section analysed with the help of theory. The chapter begins with the organisational context, as it provides an understanding of the company context before analysing the other parts. It is followed by motivation to share knowledge, HRM practices and finally the configuration of HRM practices at the case company.

4.1 Organisational context

4.1.1 Introduction to the case company

The case company is described to be a very large organisation with more than 60,000 employees and many levels of seniority (Respondent 1). All the respondents mentioned the size of the organisation and that it has an impact on their daily work. As mentioned in the method chapter the studied company values innovation, and the link between research and application of new technology is highly prioritised. Knowledge sharing activities are therefore intensive and very important. Although, in connection to knowledge sharing activities various respondents (2,3,6,8) pointed out that it was difficult to know whether the knowledge had already been developed in another unit or to whom it might be useful.

4.1.2 Empirical findings: organisational context

There are several intra-firm systems with different purposes, although, two of them stood out from the rest and were the most used ones. The first one is a companywide IT-system for storing and accessing information across the company. Respondent 2 explained that one of the challenges when using this system was that information is hard to find, as the system contains so much information.

[...] what we don’t do well is that there is oceans of that data right? So, there is oceans of that material available and structuring that in a way that makes it easier for people to find relevant information is sometimes difficult. [...] So there are definitely efforts to making it more user friendly, and accessible. But I think a lot of the knowledge transfer is still done face-to-face between people, I think that’s about 90 percent of the knowledge transfer. (Respondent 2)
This reasoning was supported by some of the respondents (1,3), however, respondent 6, 7 and 8 found the search tool to be effective although slightly hindered by access levels. Meaning that information could be found but not always accessed as there were many restriction levels. Respondent 3 and 10 pointed out that not everyone uses the same terminology which might make it if difficult to find information even if the search tool was effective.

Several respondents combined the main IT-system with a social platform system which allowed sharing smaller amount of information such as articles, photos and links to the information on the main system (Respondent 1,2,5,6,10). The social platform made it easier to reach out to and contact the target groups or networks (Respondent 1,5,6,9,10). However, the same respondents said that, although, these systems exist many employees prefer to directly reach out to co-workers at the office to get the needed information. Besides the intra-firm systems there were various ways to communicate and share knowledge such as emails, team meetings, regular catch ups and conference calls. All the respondents felt that they had a good variation in communication channels.

When the respondents explained an occasion where they had shared knowledge it became apparent that many shared knowledge with people they had previously been in contact with, meaning their network. Respondent 7 and 10 explained that much of the non-structured knowledge lies within employees and is difficult to write down. Therefore, the employees turned to their network to gain this type of information. Respondent 8 and 10 were critical towards this dependence on networks, as all types of information should be available to everyone regardless of who they know. Respondent 6, 8, 9 and 10 talked about the importance of networks and how social activities can help to build stronger connections with co-workers. Further, the case company encourages employees to switch positions within the company which also helps them to build strong employee networks. As the quote below demonstrates, a strong network opens up to more opportunities for finding and sharing knowledge:

*Within [the case company] networks are crucial, you need to know people if you want to move up but also if you need certain information. We are so big that it can be hard to find and through networks you usually get there. And if you work with people from different areas they always know someone who works in the department you were looking for.* (Respondent 1)
All the respondents described that they had relaxed relationships with their co-workers and their closest managers. The informal structure made it easy to approach co-workers and managers with questions or concerns. Some of the respondents (2,4,8) also mentioned that they experienced a non-competitive climate and therefore, they felt more open towards sharing knowledge. Further, many of the respondents (2,3,5,7) felt that the climate had a positive impact on their working environment and that this was an important factor for them to feel comfortable at work. The same respondent explained that there were no barriers when they needed to get in touch with co-workers outside their units. However, some of the respondents pointed out that the relationships across units were more distant and could at times hinder collaboration (Respondent 4,6,7,8,10). This was explained to be because of the different goals and priorities the units had, as it made it difficult to collaborate and work together (Respondents 4,8,10). Further, various respondents (1,4,6,7,8,10) had difficulties describing what the organisational views on knowledge sharing were. Although, they knew that it generally was a valued activity, they argued that it could be valued more.

"[...] of course there is nobody to answer that we don’t want you to share knowledge. It’s more are you encouraged to do so, or how much time are you expected to spend on knowledge sharing. I think it’s maybe not encouraged as much as it should be. (Respondent 5)"

4.1.3 Analysis of the organisational context

The case company is a large organisation that holds ungraspable amounts of information, consequently employees cannot be aware of what is happening in other parts of the organisation. Even though the main system helps to make information accessible, many of the employees found it hard to find the correct information due to the large amount of data, limited search tools and access levels within the organisation. The difficulty described among the respondents when using the system can be related to the feeling of being overwhelmed. Which Whelan and Teigland (2013) describe to be common issue when employees are exposed to IT-systems that contains huge amounts of information. A consequence described by the same authors is that employees might feel discouraged to share knowledge as it might feel unnecessary when there already is so much information “out there”. Therefore, what type of intra-firm system an organisation uses is by Szulanski (1996) argued to be of great importance when transferring knowledge within organisations and the described limitations in the case company system could therefore be a barrier to knowledge sharing. However, as the case
company had another IT-system, which the employees used in combination with the main system, it made it easier for employees to reach out to the right people and find the right information. Also, when being contacted directly by other employees the respondents felt more eager to share their knowledge rather than just uploading it to the system. One can therefore argue that the social platform system worked as a supporting function to the limited main system and facilitated knowledge sharing within the company.

What became evident was that the case company put a lot of focus on networks, as already touched upon with the social platform IT-system above. Many of the respondents also turned directly to people they knew within the network to find relevant information. In this aspect, the relationship between sender and receiver becomes important for transferring knowledge within the organisation which is also highlighted by Minbaeva (2007) to be an influential facilitator. However, to consider is the limitations of depending on networks when transferring knowledge within organisations. As explained by Minbaeva (2007), the extent of knowledge transfer depends on how extensive the networks are. Having a small network could therefore limit employees to only take part or share information with a limited amount of people, and employees outside the network might not benefit from the knowledge, which could lead to reinventing the wheel. This issue was highlighted by some of the respondents. However, the company was in general good at creating networking opportunities which allowed employees to extend their networks. These kinds of opportunities to engage in social activities and networking opportunities is by Minbaeva et al. (2012) and Llopis and Foss (2016) described to have a positive effect on knowledge sharing which could be argued to compensate for the possible drawbacks on relying on networks.

The respondents had many communication channels at their disposal, and therefore many ways to share knowledge. Whether having many ways to share knowledge was better suitable for intrinsically motivated respondents could not be determined, which was Andreeva and Sergeeva’s (2016) reasoning. The same authors argued that few ways to share knowledge would suit extrinsically motivated people. As already stated, this could not be supported by our empirical findings as all the respondents had a positive attitude towards having many channels to communicate. Although, it could be argued that the channels worked as a facilitator to knowledge sharing as all the respondents felt that they had good possibilities to share knowledge.
The relationship between units, was described to sometimes be hindered by different goals or priorities, although, one can argue that this is common in large corporations as all units have their own detailed goals. Moreover, many respondents were unsure what the organisational views on knowledge sharing were although they knew it was a valued activity. The contradiction in this aspect was that many of the respondents felt that it was not a priority among many of the managers and therefore, not an activity that was given time. Further, individual performances were rewarded rather than collaboration, which had a negative impact on the overall supportive climate of knowledge sharing (these two aspects will be discussed further in the following sections). How supportive the organisational climate is of knowledge sharing is by Szulanski (1996) described to be important as having contradicting signals could create confusion among employees as they do not get a united picture whether the organisation supports knowledge sharing or not.

4.2 Knowledge sharing

4.2.1 Empirical findings: knowledge sharing experiences & reasons

The respondents described one occasion or project when they shared knowledge with another unit. The information shared was both technical specificities and abstract non-structured knowledge. The non-structured knowledge was in most cases shared face-to-face or through video calls. The written knowledge was either sent by email or added to the IT-systems. It was common that the shared knowledge took both forms which meant that written reports often had to be followed up by face to face calls or meetings. In these cases, the respondents were asked to follow up on certain information and all of them felt very happy to elaborate on the specific topic. In some cases when sending out written reports or webcasts the respondents were unsure how many that had received the knowledge, as not all the recipients responded to the information. In cases when the knowledge was shared in large conference calls it was also difficult to know who was paying attention or not. Two of the respondents (3,6) explained that not knowing who the receiver was and if the knowledge was useful for the receiver made the respondent feel less eager to share the knowledge.

_I think as longs as you don’t have someone that wants to receive that knowledge it’s not very appealing to just send it out and nothing. So, that is something important to keep in mind you need to have a clear recipient of the information that you are sharing._ (Respondent 3)
It was mentioned by almost all respondents that managers’ priorities, when it comes to knowledge sharing, made an impact on how it was viewed in the different teams and how much time they were given for these activities. Therefore, due to time restraints they could not spend time on projects outside of their own unit (Respondent 1, 4, 7). Respondent 1 mentioned that it was difficult to get time to share information which they know could be of value to another unit, as it was not something that was beneficial for the own unit. Further, some of the respondents felt that knowledge sharing activities were not encouraged as much as it should be (Respondent 1, 5, 6, 10). This is demonstrated by the following quote:

_I think at the moment the effort that you put into knowledge sharing is not proportional to what you get for it. If you would depend on that it would not be knowledge sharing. It needs to be a fare balance [...] So if you do something in terms of knowledge sharing, it is more beneficial to people outside of your [area], it’s not that much value to the senior leaders within your area._ (Respondent 1)

All the respondents had different kinds of roles and all had to do some kind of knowledge sharing as an integral part of their day to day work. Further, some argued that knowledge sharing is a part of their job and nothing they should receive extra rewards to do (1, 3, 6, 8, 10). A reason to why they shared knowledge was that they wanted to do a good job.

_I mean a very typical motivation is that if I do not share this knowledge I am not able to complete my job responsibilities and it won’t satisfy the demands of my leadership team. Which ultimately could lead to my failure in the role which might even lead to me losing my job._ (Respondent 7)

However, many of the respondents engaged in knowledge sharing activities beyond their official role because of personal interest, to help others or to share experiences which others could learn from (Respondent 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10). For example, Respondent 3, made a package with lessons learned from a previous position and shared this information with co-workers that might find it useful, even though the manager had not asked for it. Various respondents shared knowledge as it could prevent other colleagues from reinventing the wheel (Respondent 2, 3, 6, 8, 10). Moreover, three respondents (5, 6, 10) mentioned that through sharing knowledge they can help others but also learn and develop themselves.
I’m very motivated to share also if I can achieve any of my own goals by sharing knowledge, because you usually get offered some knowledge in return. Or it can make your idea better because you can use the other one as a sparring partner. Those are the main drivers. (Respondent 5)

4.2.2 Analysis of knowledge sharing experiences & motivation

Tacit knowledge was mostly shared face-to-face or through online calls. As sharing this type of knowledge in written form often was described as difficult and time consuming, which is corroborated by theory (Grant, 1996; Minbaeva, 2007). Further, it became clear that when sharing knowledge, it was at times unclear for the respondent how many received the knowledge, and if the receiver could make any use of it. This was by some respondents directly described to not be appealing and others implied that it sometimes felt as a waste of time, as there was no clear receiver. Ciabuschi (2005) writes that not having a clear receiver is an issue which may cause discouragement to engage in knowledge sharing activities when using IT-systems. This can also be related to what Whelan and Teigland (2013) states about IT-system that might contain so much information that the sender does not feel that they are contributing to something meaningful when uploading written reports or similar. Many of the respondents felt more encouraged to share knowledge when they were directly contacted by colleagues and asked to elaborate on the information they had found. Consequently, one could argue that using networks to share knowledge is efficient in the case company. As when being contacted directly the respondents were more motivated to share the knowledge. This can once again be related to what Minbaeva (2007) states about relationships and networks as it has a positive influence on knowledge sharing.

An important part of the respondents’ knowledge sharing experiences regarded what priorities their managers had. As the manager had such large impact on whether knowledge sharing was prioritised or not, it could be both an enabler and an obstacle to sharing knowledge. This can be related to what Foss et al. (2015) discuss in relation to configurations, that the whole HRM system needs to send the same message, which in this case means that the managers need to have similar priorities when it comes to knowledge sharing. Consequently, the dispersed priorities had a somewhat negative overall impact on the perception among employees on the importance of knowledge sharing. Even if the respondent's own manager was supportive of knowledge sharing other teams might have the opposite attitude, and why would one team set
aside time for knowledge sharing activities when others were not. Further, the upper leadership tended to not support activities that did not benefit the own area. This can become an issue as Minbaeva et al. (2012) state that to motivate knowledge sharing a HRM system must be cohesive and strong in how it signals the organisational values. If the organisation values knowledge sharing, this message should be aligned throughout the whole organisation.

4.2.2.1 Extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation

Respondents 2 and 7 appeared to be extrinsically motivated to share knowledge according to the theory of Self-Determination. This because Respondents 2 and 7’s reasons for sharing knowledge was that it was part of their job. Further, when asked more about motivators Respondent 2 stated that achieving the goals for the performance management review, which was set together with the manager, was the key motivator for sharing knowledge. This is in line with the SDT definition of extrinsic motivation, as it is not a voluntary act and the feedback given by the manager work as an extrinsic motivator (Foss et al., 2009). Respondent 7’s reasons slightly differed from Respondent 2’s as it was apparent that Respondent 7 was also motivated by contributing to the performance and goals of the organisation. However, Respondent 7 did not act voluntarily to share knowledge more than was required. An explanation to Respondent 7’s less extrinsic behaviour could according to SDT be that extrinsic motivation also can be voluntary if the respondent previously needed rewards or punishments, however, over time the motivation have become integrated in the personal attitudes and values.

Respondents 4, 9 and 10 had similar attitudes to knowledge sharing as they thought that it was a part of their job but also engaged in these activities outside their job tasks. They voluntarily engaged in knowledge sharing to help others that they thought could use the knowledge or shared knowledge with others as it would benefit the organisation. According to the SDT this type of emotional commitment to doing their job and being aligned with the organisational goals implies that they are intrinsically motivated to share knowledge.

Respondents 1, 3 and 8 all shared knowledge as part of their job but also beyond their responsibilities. They emphasised that rewards were not necessary to be motivated to share knowledge. Respondent 1 described that innovation and knowledge sharing was a big interest and passion. Respondent 3 went well beyond the responsibilities and put together a whole package of knowledge with lessons learned. Respondent 8 found personal satisfaction to share
knowledge that would help others. Which means that Respondents 1, 3 and 8 are highly intrinsically motivated to share knowledge.

Respondent 5 also mentioned sharing knowledge beyond the role and was argued to be important for the Respondent’s self-development, as knowledge sharing was a personal goal as well. This implies that Respondent 5 was intrinsically motivated to share knowledge as SDT states that intrinsically motivated people act voluntarily and feel that they fulfil their personal goals. Respondent 6 had the same attitude as Respondent 5, however, also pointed out that rewards were not necessary and should not be primary driver behind sharing knowledge.

To sum up the differences in motivation among the respondents; only one was clearly extrinsically motivated to share knowledge. Another respondent was extrinsically motivated as well, however, knowledge sharing had as suggested become ingrained into the personal values to some extent. The rest were to different degrees intrinsically motivated to engage in knowledge sharing activities. The reason behind this domination of intrinsically motivated respondent could depend on that their jobs include a lot of inherent knowledge sharing, to be able to perform their job well (which all of them was intrinsically motivated to do) they need to share knowledge.

4.3 The HRM system & motivation

4.3.1 Empirical findings: performance management system

The case company uses a performance management system that rates individual performance on a yearly basis, which is reviewed in the end of the year by each manager. The employees receive a grade based on how well the employee has achieved the goals which he or she has set together with the manager. The employees are committed to perform these goals during the year (Respondent 6). The grade is cross-referenced between other members of the manager’s team to make sure that the person has exceeded what he or she has written as a goal, but also that it is enough compared to others (Respondent 2). Further, if they have performed above expectation there are special recognition rewards which range from small vouchers to large monetary rewards (Respondent 5). Only one respondent (2) found the system to be encouraging, as it was possible to differentiate themselves from others and to make their work more visible. Some of the respondents (1,4,5,6) were not motivated by external rewards at all and therefore not encouraged by the system. There were also respondents (1,3,5,7,8) who had a negative
attitude towards the system, which lead them to not be encouraged. Moreover, various respondents (1,3,5,6,7,9,10) pointed out that recognition in form of good feedback from managers or co-workers was more important than financial rewards. Although, they did not mind getting a reward for something they achieved.

The respondents (1,3,5,7,8) negative attitudes towards the system were explained by the perceived flaws with the system. These were described to be the unfair and non-representative evaluation of the yearly performance, which depends a lot on the individual managers and what type of projects the employees take part in (Respondents 1,3,5). The goals that the employee and manager come up with can differ a lot depending on what the manager finds important, for example, knowledge sharing can be an important part of the goals if the manager encourages this activity and sets aside time for it (Respondents 1,2,4,5,6).

*It doesn't work, as it is all about the perception of senior leaders that don’t even work with you. This makes it all about visibility and how active your manager is, and less so about how good you work and how important your role is in stimulating the team as a whole. [...] It is unfair and doesn't motivate me at all.* (Respondent 1)

Another aspect about the system that respondents 1, 2, 5 and 6 brought up is that it depends a lot on whether they make their performances visible or not. Meaning that they have spent a lot of time on writing up reports to show what they have done in order for their achievements to be noticed.

* [...] there is a whole cottage industry around making [the work] look good. I prefer much more to spend my time on doing the work instead of making it look good. If you are working in a big company, sort of showing what you can do is, I think the image of being a good worker is half the job.* (Respondent 5)

Respondents 1, 6 and 7 thought that one of the issues with the performance management system was that it rewards individuals rather than teams and collaborations. It therefore gives incentives to focus on the individual performance rather than achieving something together with your team.
4.3.1.1 Analysis of the performance management system

Respondent 2 who was identified to be extrinsically motivated found the performance management system to be encouraging. This goes in line with theory, as Minbaeva’s (2008) study found that performance management systems and rewards extrinsically motivate. Respondent 7 who also was found to be extrinsically motivated, thought that rewards were essential. However, the same respondent did not like the structure of the performance management system and was therefore not encouraged by it. If the system was better designed Respondent 7 could arguably be motivated by it to share more knowledge.

The reason to why many of the respondents did not find the system to be encouraging was due to various flaws, one main fault was that it was individualistic. Consequently, it did not evaluate if employees worked well together with other units and shared knowledge. The system compared employees within the same team against each other and it could be argued that it gives incentives to be selfish. Since helping others by sharing knowledge may result in your own grade getting lower as others perform better. This is in line with what Husted et al. (2012) state about reward systems, that it can lead to hoarding of knowledge and less sharing, as it increases strategic thinking. Szulanski (1996) stated that lack of motivation to share knowledge might be due to a loss in a privileged position. Among the intrinsically motivated respondents there was no indication that the performance management system increased hoarding and decreased motivation to share knowledge. Although, the same respondents did not mind receiving a reward for something they had done, however, it was not what drove them. Tendency towards hoarding of knowledge could be identified in the one respondent that were extrinsically motivated and encouraged by the system, as this person shared knowledge to the extent that was required to achieve his or her performance goals, but not more than that. As the employees that were driven by intrinsic motivation were not affected negatively, we could not support what Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) write about SDT, which is that HRM practises that aim to extrinsically motivate can interfere with intrinsic motivation.

Also, according to Deci (1975), to have a functioning performance management system there needs to be control mechanisms that tracks performance fairly and gives rewards proportionally to performance. The performance management system at the case company lacks these requirements as it is highly dependent on what the manager prioritises. So, if the manager does not value collaborations and knowledge sharing, the employees will not have it as a goal and
not be evaluated on that aspect. Almost all the respondents stated that they thought that knowledge sharing activities should be valued more. Also, the fact that the performance evaluation depended a lot on what the employee made visible further shows the faults of the system. Based on these findings it can be argued that the performance management system works poorly in regard to motivating employees to share knowledge and not in line with organisational goals. This could be the reason to why one of the extrinsically motivated respondents did not find the system encouraging.

Both respondents that were intrinsically and extrinsically motivated found recognition and feedback to be encouraging, which according to Foss et al. (2009) is an extrinsic motivator. According to SDT, only the two extrinsically motivated employees should have been motivated by feedback. A possible explanation to why our findings differ from theory could be that the intrinsically motivated respondents found it nice to receive feedback and recognition, to confirm that they were doing a good job. But essentially it was not what drove them to share knowledge.

4.3.2 Empirical findings: career development

All the respondents felt that they had good opportunities within career development and therefore good chances to advance within the organisation. Meaning that if there is an ambition and will to advance not much will hinder a good career development (Respondent 2,3,6,8,9,10). Some respondents (1,2,3,6,8) brought up that the organisation encourages job rotation, which means that most employees switch roles after a few years. This allows them to explore new opportunities and broaden their competence.

"As a graduate for example, you get a lot of different roles so you are very aware, you get to jump around the company and perform a lot of different tasks. I think that’s really improving your development." (Respondent 3)

All the respondents found it important to have good opportunities within career development. Respondents 2, 3 and 4 explained that they did not necessarily strive to get a higher position, rather, the opportunities contribute to personal development in a stimulating way through gained competences and experiences. Respondents 8, 9 and 10 pointed out that many of the job
opportunities came from within the networks, and therefore, it was important to actively attend events and get to know people from all parts of the company.

_We have an overall kind of structure in place to let’s say look for jobs or look for mentors or look for new assignments. But in addition to that there is a lot of informal ways to do that, via those networks, and besides the platforms, mostly are the first ones that are getting those opportunities before they make it into those official channels. Sometimes they can be grabbed before they move to the official channels._ (Respondent 9)

4.3.2.1 Analysis of career development

Career development was highly valued by all the respondents who were intrinsically motivated. According to Minbaeva et al. (2009), career development can be used to intrinsically motivate as it gives opportunities for self-development and self-actualisation. Further, Minbaeva et al. (2009) argue that career development should work as a motivator for intrinsically motivated respondents to share more knowledge. Some of the respondents confirmed this as they stated that having a large network provided them with career development opportunities. Consequently, the respondents were more active in creating a large network and therefore also shared more knowledge. This is once again supported by Minbaeva (2007) who argues that the more extensive network, the more knowledge is shared. Therefore, it becomes evident that networks play a central role when it comes to both career development opportunities and knowledge sharing. Employees being encouraged to switch roles within the company also supports this, as it helps to build strong networks. Some of the respondents mentioned that job opportunities are often filled by people from the hiring managers network. This means that those who have strong networks consequently have more opportunities within career development. To consider, is that this practise could therefore be a less effective motivator to employees that have smaller networks.

Respondent 7 who was extrinsically motivated also valued the opportunities available. According to theory, Respondent 7 should not be encouraged to share more knowledge because of good career development opportunities. However, Respondent 7 would engage in more knowledge sharing knowing as it could lead to achieving career goals. This contrast what Minbaeva (2008) states about career development as an intrinsic motivator. A possible reason behind this might be that achieving the career goals would lead to a higher position and salary, which would be a financial incentive that falls into extrinsic motivation. The reason behind this
interpretation is that Respondent 7 did not show signs of striving for self-development rather wanted a higher position. It is therefore more in line with what Minbaeva (2008) states about extrinsic motivation.

4.3.3 Empirical findings: job design

Job design includes the flexibility the employees have in their working arrangement and how much variety they have in the tasks they perform. The flexibility in the respondents working arrangement varied a bit, however, common for all is that they had the ability to organise their schedule by themselves. In terms of taking independent decisions, it differed between the respondents, most had a lot of independency in making their own decision while some (3,5) had to follow up more frequently with their managers to get approvals. Most of them could work from other locations or from home at times (Respondents 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,10). There was also variety in the tasks the respondents perform, however, to a larger or smaller extent. Further, all the respondents explained that they work with different kinds of projects which contribute with variation in the tasks they perform.

Most the respondents (4,5,6,7,8,10) had a positive attitude to how their job is structured in terms of flexibility and variety in their daily work. Especially flexibility in planning their own schedule was important to the same respondents as it gave them a sense of control and freedom. Respondent 9 pointed out that the flexibility was one of the main prerequisite when looking for a job and various respondents (6,7,8,9,10) argued that flexibility made them happier when performing their job. In connection to knowledge sharing respondents (2,4,7,8) mentioned that the flexible work design had a positive impact on their knowledge sharing behaviour. This was because the flexibility required more communication with others to be aligned in what they were doing during projects.

4.3.3.1 Analysis of job design

The respondents all felt that job design was important as it gave them a sense of flexibility and control over their daily work which made them happier with their job arrangement. Minbaeva (2008) argued that a flexible job design and work hours increases intrinsic motivation among employees as it impacts self-control and self-regulation, although, this was not supported by the statistical findings in the same study. However, Foss et al. (2009) found that having an autonomous job design did impact intrinsic motivation. Some respondents mentioned that due
to their flexible job design they shared more knowledge to stay updated with other colleagues, however, this could not be directly connected to intrinsic motivation. Since it was hard to know if the flexibility was the underlying motivating factor or if it was a part of their job description, and thereby not dependent on whether they had flexibility or not. As Minbaeva (2008) stated, intrinsic motivation is difficult to directly influence. To consider is that many of the respondents felt more satisfied with their job when they had freedom and control (Respondent 6,7,8,9,10). One can argue that these positive feelings lean towards intrinsic motivation, however, nothing that could be directly connected to knowledge sharing. Moreover, job design has in theory been proven to be important when it comes to configurations of HRM practises which will be discussed in the next section.

4.3.4 Analysis of configurations of HRM practises

It is important to look at how the HRM practises at the case firm work together and whether they are internally aligned as it impacts how they support knowledge sharing, as Foss et al. (2015) state, the practises need to be aligned to be effective. Our findings indicate that the practises at the case company are not internally aligned. This as the performance management system promotes individual performance rather than group performance. As stated by Murray & Peyrefitte (2007) knowledge is transferred when one unit is affected by the experience from another unit. The performance management system does not support knowledge sharing as the activity of sending knowledge does not affect the sender’s personal performance evaluation. It is rather the receiving part that will be able to use the knowledge and therefore, benefit from it in terms of performance.

How the organisation signals their values on knowledge sharing is a part of the organisational context and supportive climate to knowledge sharing. Although, the respondents more or less knew that knowledge sharing was a valued activity in the organisation, it became evident that managers did not have a shared perception of how much knowledge sharing was valued in the company, and this in turn communicated uncertainties to the employees. The employees were all clear that the manager’s role and perception of knowledge sharing was the most important factor when given time to do these activities. In the HRM configuration it is therefore, apparent that the managers need to have a cohesive perception of knowledge sharing, so that they convey an aligned message to the employees.
The climate in the company was found to be supportive of knowledge sharing within the own unit, between units it became less supportive, however, still overall a supportive climate. Although, researchers have stated that intrinsically motivated individuals do not need a supportive climate to share knowledge (Llopis & Foss, 2016). The findings in our study indicate that intrinsically motivated respondents shared knowledge to help others and therefore, if the climate would be less supportive they might not share knowledge as much. The reason behind this was that employees would feel less inclined to help if the climate was less friendly.

The empirical findings in this study showed that respondents that had an autonomous job design, supportive climate and were intrinsically motivated to share knowledge, perceived rewards as something pleasant but not needed. This could be compared with the informational rewards from Foss et al. (2015). They studied the configuration of HRM practises including autonomous job design, supportive climate and rewards. Their findings showed that rewards were perceived as informational when having supportive climate and autonomous job design, which also lead to being more intrinsically motivated. It could also be related to Andreeva and Sergeeva’s (2016) argument that intrinsically motivated employees are not necessarily affected negatively by reward systems, rather it also depends on other factors such as job design and type of reward. As the majority of the respondents showed sign of intrinsic motivation it could be possible that having a supportive climate and autonomous job design, lead to this attitude among the respondents towards rewards.

Llopis and Foss (2016) and Foss et al. (2015) in their studies found that a non-controlling job design worked well in configuration with other HRM practises and helps to enhance intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. This implies that job design is an important part of the HRM configurations which was also seen in this study. In this study job design was found to not have a clear impact on motivation to share knowledge. Although, job design had a positive impact on the respondents’ well-being as well as time management. It could therefore work as a facilitator to knowledge sharing as the employee can make room for these activities. Job design in combination with other practises can therefore be argued to be important as it can contribute to how the respondent perceive the other practises. Meaning that the autonomous job-design can make the respondents feel in control of their agenda and therefore do not perceive the other HRM practises as controlling.
5.0 Discussion

This chapter includes a discussion of the empirical findings in relation to the conceptual model. It also provides theoretical implications and contributions. The discussion starts with the HRM practises and then naturally follows each step of the model, finishing with the organisational context.

The first part of the conceptual model is the HRM system, which examines how specific practises, and their configurations, influence employee motivation to share knowledge. Job design could in this study not be related directly to employee extrinsic- or intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. However, job design could influence how other HRM practises are perceived, and in that way, enhance intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. This supports what Llopis and Foss (2016) and Foss et al. (2015) states about autonomous job design as an important part of the configurations of practises. The one practise that showed a clear influence on intrinsic motivation to share knowledge was career development, which is in line with SDT and Minbaeva et al. (2009). Networks were essential to create good career development opportunities, and was therefore seen as important by those who were intrinsically motivated to share knowledge. To consider is that in this study the importance of networks might have a certain impact, as career development and networks were dependent on each other. Perhaps if they had not been as interconnected the result may have been different. As mentioned, intrinsic motivation is not easily managed (Minbaeva, 2008; Minbaeva et al., 2012), which might be the reason to why it is hard to see direct influences of specific HRM practises. This makes it important to consider the whole HRM system as there might exist synergies among the practises.

The performance management system showed to extrinsically motivate one respondent to share knowledge. Another respondent who felt rewards were necessary to encourage knowledge sharing, was not motivated by the system due to its faults. This is still in line with Minbaeva (2008) as rewards did motivate extrinsically to share knowledge, however, as this study only had two extrinsically motivated respondents it is difficult to generalise towards theory. Those who were intrinsically motivated did not perceive the system as encouraging and did not need rewards to share knowledge. However, feedback which was claimed by Foss et al. (2009) to be an extrinsic motivator, was found to be appreciated by the intrinsically motivated employees as
well. It could not be determined if the intrinsically motivated respondents shared more knowledge due to getting feedback. While with the extrinsically motivated respondents the influence of feedback on their performance was clearer, which goes in line with what Foss et al. (2009) state. Relating back to our problem statement which highlighted variations in the results on whether HRM practises affect motivation to share knowledge or not. We have showed that all the practises could indirectly or directly be related to motivation to share knowledge. This might be due to our micro level and qualitative approach, which was argued to be necessary when studying motivation (Felin & Hesterly, 2007; Minbaeva et al., 2009; Minbaeva et al., 2012).

Moving on to the configuration of practises; the ones creating inconsistency in the configuration of HRM practises were the performance management system and how the organisation through the HRM system communicated their views on knowledge sharing. There were inconsistencies in managers’ perceptions on whether knowledge sharing activities should be prioritised. Meaning that the signalling from the HRM system about knowledge sharing as a valued activity was not clear. Consequently, spreading uncertainties among employees and the climate as a whole. Minbaeva et al. (2012) state that HRM systems can signal values which in turn impact the organisational climate and knowledge sharing behaviour. Our findings support this, as how the HRM system signals their values showed to be a very powerful tool impacting both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated employees. This also indicated that it is important to consider the organisational context when studying the configuration of HRM practises, as it contributes to the supportive climate. Studying configurations of practises and if they convey a consistent message resulted to be important as one deviating practise might create uncertainties regarding knowledge sharing activities within the whole organisation. We argue that this study has contributed with further understanding on the relationship between HRM practises and motivation to share knowledge, as there are few studies which have had this type of holistic perspective.

The second part of the conceptual model regards intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge, and how these two types interact. According to the SDT, practises that aim to extrinsically motivate can affect intrinsic motivation negatively (Andreeva & Sergeeva, 2016). Our findings did not support this, as the performance management system did not influence the intrinsically motivated employees negatively, and they found rewards to be pleasant. Foss et al.
(2015) and Andreeva and Sergeeva (2016) found that the interpretation of rewards depends on the other practises in the configuration. In these configurations, autonomous job design has shown to affect how rewards are interpreted. Therefore, as the respondents all had autonomous jobs, to varying degrees, it might cause rewards to be interpreted as pleasant, or informational as Foss et al. (2015) express it. This further indicates the importance of looking at the whole HRM system and the combination of HRM practises.

The third section in the conceptual model concerns knowledge sharing. It was clear that intrinsic motivation lead to knowledge sharing beyond the respondents own responsibilities. Indicating that in accordance with SDT and previous studies, intrinsic motivation lead to more knowledge sharing than extrinsic motivation. This because the extrinsically motivated respondents only shared knowledge that was needed in their role or to the extent where they received external motivators.

As suggested in the conceptual model, the organisational context could influence or have a facilitating effect on HRM practices and motivation to share knowledge. The findings on communication channels could not be related to intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation as in Andreeva and Sergeeva’s (2016) study. However, it can be argued that many communication channels facilitated knowledge sharing as the employees felt that they had many ways of sharing knowledge, this is in line with Minbaeva (2007).

The most interesting finding regarding the organisational context was the importance of networks in the relationship between HRM practises and motivation to share knowledge. This had not been emphasised by the researchers in the theoretical review and we argue that this is one of our main theoretical contributions. In the conceptual model the relationships between sender and receiver was considered, as it was found by Minbaeva (2007) to impact knowledge transfer. The relationships could be related to networks, as they are built on relationships between employees. The theory states that large networks and social activities increase knowledge transfer (Llopis & Foss, 2016; Minbaeva, 2007). Relating back to the conceptual model we argue that networks should be given a larger role in the relationship between HRM and motivation to share knowledge. This because networks helped employees to find and share knowledge when they felt overwhelmed and sometimes unmotivated to share knowledge on the
IT-systems or in large conference calls. This because they did not have a clear receiver, as Ciabuschi (2005) identified as a motivational issue. Further, networks were integrated in career development. Since career development worked as a motivator to have large networks it created more opportunities for career development. This in turn had a positive impact on knowledge sharing. We argue that the micro perspective and inherent openness of this study made it possible to find and investigate the large impact of networks.

In sum, viewing motivation as a mediator between HRM and knowledge sharing, showed to be accurate and many of the findings were supported by previous research. What this thesis theoretically contributes with is emphasising the need to view the whole HRM system, and the organisational context. If the organisational context had not been included the strong influence of networks would not have been found, which is also a theoretical contribution of this study.
6.0 Conclusions

This chapter concludes this study. The conclusions are followed by suggestions for future research, managerial implications and finally the limitations of this study.

6.1 Conclusions

To answer the research question “How do HRM practises influence subsidiary employees’ intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge with employees at other units?” a qualitative study was made. The HRM practises that showed to have a clear impact on motivation to share knowledge with other units, either intrinsically or extrinsically, were career development (intrinsic) and the performance management system (extrinsic). These findings were both in line with previous theory. Further, certain aspects of the supportive climate also showed a direct influence on intrinsic motivation to share knowledge, as a supportive climate made the respondents more inclined to help others. This was not supported by previous studies. Another aspect of supportive climate was the perceptions of organisational commitment to knowledge sharing, which showed to have an indirect influence on both intrinsic- and extrinsic motivation to share knowledge. This because managers valued knowledge sharing differently and in turn communicated an inconsistent view to employees. Moreover, job design worked well in configuration with other practises which was in line with what some of the previous studies had shown. This conclusion was reached by considering the whole HRM system which was an important part of the purpose of this study. Another main finding, was that networks were found to be essential in the company as it was integrated in career development and was an important way for respondents to share knowledge. We argue that by doing a qualitative study with openness to new details it was possible to reach this finding, as networks were not emphasised in the theoretical review. In conclusion, this study showed the importance of seeing the whole HRM system as well as the organisational context. Since a united HRM system can be a very powerful tool to motivate employees to share knowledge.

6.2 Suggestions for future research & managerial implications

Our findings showed that HRM practises influence each other and can impact the perception of other practises. This study furthers the reasoning about HRM practises and their configurations. However, as there are few researchers that have studied configurations and the possible elevated
effect of combining certain HRM practises. We argue that future research should investigate and compare combinations of practises that work well together.

Further, networks were in this study found to play an important role in the case company. Since employees could use their networks to share knowledge instead of uploading knowledge into a system or sharing knowledge in large conference calls. When using their networks to contact each other they felt more motivated to share knowledge. Also in connection to career development networks were found to be essential. As a suggestion, future studies could investigate how networks could be used in combination with HRM practises to motivate employees to share more knowledge.

The managerial implications of this study are the importance of having a HRM system which is aligned in its message towards sharing knowledge. The signals an organisation sends out in regard to knowledge sharing values, was shown to be important. Organisations should therefore pay attention to how they convey this message. Further, our study did not show that extrinsically motivating HRM practises, such as the performance management system, had a negative impact on intrinsic motivation to share knowledge. Therefore, to reach extrinsically motivated employees, we suggest using a performance management system in combination with other practises. However, it is important that the system evaluates performance in a fair way.

6.3 Limitations

Various limitation that concerns the methodological part have already been discussed in the method chapter. However, we further want to highlight that it is important to note that this study considers only the perspective of the sender in the knowledge transfer process. Researchers have been criticised for not distinguishing between outflow and inflows, as well as only focusing on one direction (Michailova & Mustaffa, 2012). The choice to limit this study to sending knowledge is due to the aim of studying HRM systems and motivation to share knowledge at an individual level. If both the sender and receiver would have been included in the study, the amount of data would have been doubled and the detailed individual focus of the study may have been compromised.
References:


Appendix I. Survey

Background information

- Name:
- Job title:
- How long have you worked at your current company?
- In which country do you work?
- Age:

Human Resource Management System

1) Please describe how your job is structured:
   a) In terms of flexibility in scheduling your day to day work and tasks
   b) In terms of variation in the tasks you perform

2) How would you describe your opportunities within career development?

3) Organisational climate:
   a) How would you describe the relationship between co-workers? and co-workers and their managers?
   b) How would you describe the collaboration between different units?
   c) How does your organisation communicate their views on knowledge sharing, and what are their views?

4) How does the performance management system at your organisation work?
   a) How do you perceive this system?
Appendix II. Interview Guide

1) What do you think of knowledge sharing?

2) You described the organisational climate as XX in the survey.
   a) How do you feel that it impacts knowledge sharing between units?
   b) How does this impact the way you share knowledge?

3) Can you describe one significant occasion or project when you shared knowledge with another unit
   a) With how many people or units did you share the knowledge with?
   b) After sharing the knowledge, how did the other unit or people respond?
   c) Have you shared knowledge with this unit or people before?

4) Could you describe what type of knowledge you shared?

5) Can you describe any obstacles you may have encountered when sharing the knowledge?
   a) Is this usually an obstacle you encounter?

6) Describe different ways to share knowledge within your organisation (E.g. Regular meetings or IT systems)
   a) How are they used?
      i) Do you use different systems depending on the situation and type of knowledge you share? Please describe these
   b) What do you think about these ways to share knowledge?

7) Describe your reasons behind sharing knowledge with the other unit in the example?
   a) Can you come up with other reasons to why you shared the knowledge?
   b) Why are these reasons important to you?
   c) Would you say that these reasons are what normally motivates you to share knowledge?
      if no, describe why and what the reasons are
8) How do you feel about the performance management system?
   a) How do you feel about rewards as encouragement?

9) How important do you find the structure of your job is? referring to flexibility, independence and task variety
   a) How does the structure of your job impact how you share knowledge? (Flexibility, independence & task variety)

10) How important do you find that opportunities within career development are and why?
    a) How does opportunities for career development impact your performance?
    b) How does it impact your knowledge sharing with other units?

11) Are there any HR practices at your firm that we haven’t mentioned that you have encountered?
    a) What do you think about this/these practises?

12) Are there any HR practises we have talked about that you feel are more or less encouraging? Why?
### Appendix III. Example of Thematic Analysis: career development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
<th>Job Rotation</th>
<th>Networking</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Importance of Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Respondent 1</strong></td>
<td>“So, in [the case company it’s common for people to switch roles every four years, quite often quicker, but before the four years you need to switch roles. This means that people will see different parts of the organisation, some will of course move in the same team, but other also from team to team. From different role to different role and that really helps to also bring that knowledge across the organisation.”</td>
<td>“So, I think that this indeed is very important, and it’s not so much only about knowledge in general but networks. Within [the case company] networks are crucial, you need to know people if you want to move up but also if you need certain information. We are so big that it can be hard to find and through networks you usually get there. And if you work with people from different areas they always know someone who works in the department you were looking for. “</td>
<td>“Yes. It is a large organization with many different types of roles and many different levels of seniority.”</td>
<td>“So that is really important, people switch roles a lot and because they have to, and this helps to get the knowledge they for certain project etc.”</td>
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<td><strong>Respondent 2</strong></td>
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<td>Very good, there are some internal barriers but nothing you can't break if you're a superstar. So, it's really up to you to shine and show you're worth the opportunity given. Having said that, while the work environment isn't competitive at all per se, all of my colleagues are super smart and talented. That's because of the rigorous recruitment policies that make the company only hire the best candidates and no</td>
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<td>“For me, I am not ambitious towards thriving, so to speak, I’m ambitious to learn so I think that’s what drives me I enjoy being in a role where I feel like I need to catch up and I can feel it’s very challenging that’s usually also where I thrive so maybe in that sense sure I guess there is correlation. Usually in the roles that are challenging tend to be higher up in the food chain. So, I guess that is the way I rise through the ranks, but I</td>
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<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>“As a graduate for example, you get a lot of different roles so you are very aware, you get to jump around the company and perform a lot of different tasks. I think that’s really improving your development.”</td>
<td>“[…] your career development is also dependent mainly on networking and the people you know.”</td>
<td>“There is a lot of courses you can take to improve your understanding of specific topics, and if you have the ambition like myself to for example go out and work abroad in another or site or another part of the business you need to have a good engagement. Then it is often being supported.”</td>
<td>“Career development is quite important for myself. Acknowledgement is important, so people acknowledge the work you have been doing. I think actually that this is the most important. That you are acknowledged by the work you have done. Career development do actually have a view on what else you can do work towards. When you are working for something that is also being acknowledged and that proceeds your career.”</td>
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<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>“[…] the opportunities are there to learn and be better in what I do.”</td>
<td>“I can compare to other companies. I was in one company where career development was really rubbish and I kind of have taken it for granted in my previous company, and then it kind of got stuck, and I really felt it, I wasn’t happy. So yeah it’s really important.”</td>
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</table>

one else. So sometimes you can feel real pressure to perform simply because everyone else is great too. don’t think they’re development in that sense. I do have a long-term plan as to where I want to end up, but that is more focused on my passions about what I want to do.”
**Respondent 5**

I see a few opportunities in the sub-organisation I am currently working in but I also see opportunities in the wider [case company] group, or the wider IT group. I think we got a pool of around 800 IT professionals working for [the case company] in [removed for anonymity]. So, there are a lot of options to move.

**Respondent 6**

“Networking is crucial for human beings, it’s an ecosystem that supports you. If you look around you, why are there friends, they are your network of trust. We are not stand alone creatures. So, networks, of course you have to be true and authentic when you approach people. And you shouldn’t just approach people because you want something from them, but networking for me means that you don’t shut yourself away. And you try to have a real dialog and conversation with people that you normally don’t talk to. Because that is also one way of sharing knowledge. Right, you never know what you will come across, so it helps to be open.”

“I would say, I’m quite optimistic around that, because currently we are short of young talents so there are a lot of roles and cool jobs [removed for anonymity]. But overall I would say equal opportunities and there are a lot of initiatives to promote women to be on top of leadership, we don’t do enough but there is a lot of momentum gain in this area which is good. I would say that it is quite well perceived at this moment.”

“I think you own your career. Men do it quite well, in the sense that they are more daring and network a lot and its just social context, that women tend to fall in more deeper relationships than going out for a beer. But in the workplace its essentially enough. You go out for a beer and you chat a bit, you know each other by name and when you move to the next job you kind of know the hiring manager or the person at IT. I think it’s possible if you know what you really want, you can get that. It shouldn’t be any barriers and that also brings us to the aspect that if people know you by your brand that you are a person who is open, you allow others to approach you. Then it’s much easier for you to get the job that you wish for.”

**Respondent 7**

“[…] career perspectives often rely on you understanding the work that other business units are doing, in a company the size as ours. If I would

“Plentiful, as long as you have a clear picture of where you want your career to go.”

“I think the people that are working at my level are highly educated individuals that would have multiple opportunities in the job market and if
not be striving to achieve certain career goals then I think my incentive to share information about various topics would be less."

they would not see career development opportunities within our company, then we might not have the retention of employees that we currently do. I personally see it exactly like that. If I do not have a confident view that there are career opportunities for me in this company I might not be able to continue working for this company.”

**Respondent 8**

“The trainee or graduate you are placed in a variety of businesses and teams over the extent of three years. And thereby you build up a network in all of these areas, that I feel personally, and now that I have left, more than regular employees.”

“So, I think that the graduate system at [the case company] helps to create and interconnect culture across [removed for anonymity] that we have otherwise a very stable workforce that have been in the company for 20 years for example and for the past 15 they have been in the same not team but within the same hierarchy, and there is not a lot of job hopping from A to B, while trainees do that more often. So, it helps to create interconnectivity.”

“Good. I have a high 'Current estimated potential' and am a former 'graduate'. As a result, quite some visibility. Also, working very close to some senior leaders who are looking out for me. Recently have been approached if interested in a new role (which would have been promotion) but decided myself it was too early to make the step.”

“I think it is one of the reasons that I joined the company. Cause I know that they are good in [the case company], for me to grow, it is the reason that I work here but it is nothing that I take into account in decisions or on a regular basis, that I think about it.”

**Respondent 9**

“I feel I have a lot of opportunities which I am getting via people who I talk to. So, to give you an example now I am applying for a role which I am kind of applying via my network so not really using the official channels, Similarly, with multiple kind of mentoring or network, different networks activities, I mostly find out about those via the people I know. “

“There are multiple opportunities to develop.”

“So, I see that by having this kind of diverse network so people that I work with on similar things but also that are doing very different types of jobs but perhaps have one similar thing in common, I am able to actually find multiple opportunities.”
Respondent 10

“If you have a clear organisational structure you can build networks easily. But if you have a very complex and bad structure, then networks become very important for you to find the right people. So, I think these two are like complementing each other and you cannot get away with just one.”

“There always be an opportunity but you need to seek for it. Networking is high important. Also, company support the training a lot. Opportunity is a thing that you can create yourself. So, I think there is opportunity everywhere and I think it is dependent on whether you want to find it or not. Or whether you work hard enough to find opportunity or not. But there are two types of people, a people who think of doing it themselves and the people who wait for the opportunity to come. So, for the first type that is the matter of the organisation that you are in, and if there are more or less opportunity that they provide to you the second people if you just sit and wait no matter how much opportunities you have, they keep moaning anyways.”

“It really depends on what is your target, so what is your career goal. So, for some people their career goal may just be “I love the way I work, I want to stay in this position, in this comfort zone”. So, for those people they are driven by the same things and being in the same team and just holding that position. But if you have a career goal that you want to grow up in your company and you want to be the boss in your company. Then, at least if I have the goal, my motivation will be how big is my organisation how much I can grow. If there is only 200 people in my company and there is only 10 managers then I know that this company will not suit me, because there are only a few positions for me. [...] And you keep changing your career goals so ask me today and I may say I want to be a leader in the organisation like a CEO, so then I want to pick a company that has opportunities to grow within the company. But then in two years’ time I may say I want to go out and do my own start up so then I just want to have many experiences.”