**Title:** Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies and the impact on well-being of employees in Danish private and public firms.

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**Abstract**

The management in Danish firms mainly takes voluntaristic decisions in their HRM practice i.e. following pragmatically, both economic and social oriented goals and strategies. Being voluntaristic, the decisions about HRM-related issues are based on a mix of control and commitment strategies, typically within a complex social context (HRM system). This voluntaristic decision is in keen opposition to the philosophy of the hard core of HRM that emphasizes strategic orientation in a detailed controlled deployment of human resources. This paper present a view of human resources deployment that management give employees discretion in the work organization (human resources are seen as an investment), that motivate and involve employees and create well-being among employees. So, management practices commitment strategies shape well-being among employees. This idea of management challenges the ability of the organization to persist, especially when organizational and technical changes have to be implemented by employees. So, the question is: How do HRM strategies connect to the employee’s well-being?

The analytical results presented shortly in the paper build on data from project Meadow (Employee and Employer Survey 2012) of Danish firms. One idea from the HRM- and modern Working life studies literature have been argued.

**Introduction**

A central view on the firm`s persistence in the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature is that management must explicit formulate strategic and operational goals (Boxall & Purcell, 2011:37f). Consequently, managers on all levels should be able to control the deployment and performance of human resources (Bratton & Gold 2007). In Danish firms (both private and public), more than a third of the employees find that their jobs are controlled by economic goals such as produced and delivered quantity. 45 % find that their jobs are controlled by quality goals, i.e. percentage of error and satisfied customers. Moreover, from 2009 – 2012, 92 % of the employees experience that they encounter more difficulties in meeting job goals. (Meadow, Employee Survey 2012) Furthermore, more managers find that surveillance of firms´ production and service delivering has been increased since 2009 – 2012 from 89% to 93% (Meadow, Employer Survey 2012). But which strategies do firms outside economic control use? In other words, control of human resources and their performance takes place increasing, but is fairly spread and difficult to meet in Danish firms. There is a dilemma to meet, both on goals and on organizing the management control of work. This dilemma is supposed to lead to reduced employee well-being. In this article, this issue will be illuminated from an employee perspective to compare two analytic HR strategies within the HRM system.

In the philosophy of HRM, control by economic goals includes the HRM function. This function should yield value to the survival of the organization, submitted the strategic goal. The function contributes with measurements of organization of all HR work and activities. The organization of HR work can be executed through the four roles of HR function (Management of strategic human resource, Management of transformation and change, Management of firm structure, Management of employee transformation) (Ulrich 1997).

Hence, this division of labour in the HR management may increase a bureaucratic control of the deployment of human resources (Edwards 1979). Use of HR strategies is an instrument to exert control to fit the skills and knowledge of the employees to the job demand, working group and organization (Werber & De Marie, 2005). Moreover, the employees align to job changes and the circumstances of the firm.

Human resources manager has always had focus on control, especially within the labour process tradition (Hyman 1987). But nevertheless, management also needs “consent” or commitment from the labour (Burawoy 1979, Legge 1995, Poole & Warner 2001). Especially when firms are changing their technology and organization, the managers need skilled and committed workers in changing working process to succeed (Nielsen 1992, Nielsen 2012 et al, Nielsen & Pedersen 2014). Specifically, this idea of commitment has gained a foothold in the HRM approach, i.e. in different forms of bureaucratic, humanistic and cultural control (Legge 1995: 191f). What does control mean? And, do these forms for commitment strategy reduce well-being among employees? The last question is especially relevant to answer within a changed HR-practice, work organization and society (from industrial to knowledge society) and within different sectors and branches.

The practice of the human resource has changed from Personnel Management to HRM practices emphasized strategic decisions making, in the last 50`years (Bratton & Gold 2007). These tendencies have also been found in Danish firms (Cranet 1992, 1996, 2008, 2012). To support this practice, the management and especially human resource manager is making specific work place measurements of the employees` well-being, motivation, job satisfaction, job environment and their competence development. The managers` measurements support a HRM practice, orientated by management by economic goals. Paradoxically, the managers doesn`t use fully these instruments in their daily work with human resources to control behavior and performance. So, human resources manager act on “free will” and therefore take voluntaristic decisions in HR work (Nielsen 2012). Maybe, this decisions i.e. dialogue and face-to-face encounters between manager and employee at all level, maintenance a good social relationship between management and labour. So, therefore voluntaristic decisions in HR work may promote well-being among the employees. Furthermore, the assumption behind these is that a good well-being among employees increases motivation to work and competence development and the performance of labour force will be improved (Huselid, 1995).

Furthermore, a number of scholars studying working life and HRM – in opposite to principles of Scientific Management - argue that employees should have discretion and responsibility to do the work, for instance participation and involvement of employees in planning the daily work processes or in changing radically the work (Kern & Schuman 1984, Nielsen 1987, Banke & Clematide 1989, Karasek 1990, Ellström 1994, Legge 1995, Bergman 1995, Nielsen & Pedersen 2014). These forms of social relations between management and employees can be seen as commitment strategies or a part of these strategies, on the basis of interdependent trust. If so, when employees are involved, management can expect a good performance and well-being among the employees in the long term (Bratton & Gold 2007:551ff). Furthermore, firms emphasize their social responsibility or social legitimacy being a motive in HRM practice, because the firm is embedded moreover in the society norms and regulation from laws of job environment and employment relationships and collective bargaining, especially in Nordic and central Europe countries. So, HRM strategies also require socio-political objectives to meet (Boxall & Purcell 2011).

This view opposite to voluntaristic behavior of management is a conception of strategic HRM, where control by economic goals and deployment of human resources is tightening up on all decision levels in the organization (Fombrun et al 1984, Boxall & Purcell 2011, 26f). Furthermore, economic control of human behavior has been visible in the transition from industrial society to the knowledge society (Nielsen m. fl. 2008:10, 45). Paradoxically, the control and measurements of performance is still increasing, when the labour force in the knowledge society represents a huge degree of “tacit knowledge”. The labor force involves and finds meaning in doing work by using their knowledge and skills in extreme, strained labour processes (Olsén 2008:47f). Maybe, the employee finds well-being in doing work that demand (potential) knowledge and skills of the individual labour force (Karasek 1999). So, HR-strategies have different impact on industrial and knowledge workers` well-being.

However, management use measurements, evaluation and control of the labour process, but the development of the human resources in the knowledge society challenge this control. Futhermore, should management decentralize their economic control, and therefore also legitimate well-being to the employees? If so, we have to conceptualize, that both production and consumption of knowledge is coinciding, in places and times in changeable labour processes. This means that increased economic control from management at all levels reduce the impact of goals on productivity and well-being. In improving these goals instead, the worker or the working group must take all the detail decisions on working by using their competences and knowledge.

Hence, the idea of this paper is: In modern working life, both commitment and control strategies are used and followed up side by side on the labour processes in the single firm. These strategies have different impacts on the well-being among employees. However, the question is how these strategies impact well-being on the work place.

The purpose of the article is therefore to discuss this issue from a perspective that management should have an interest to decentralize strategies in work organization in order to secure and develop well-being among the employees and better economic control

**HRM strategies and well-being in a HRM system**

In this article, the theoretically focus is on two significant elements and their interdependence in a human resource management system (HRM system). The elements refer to: HRM strategies and the well-being of employees within a HRM system.

Figure 1: HRM strategies and well-being within a HRM system

A HRM system is a social system in the firm. A broad definition of HRM is that it comprises all activities involving management and the development of human resources within the organization. This embraces activities that are related to organizing the work, recruitment, development and application of human resources, rewards, assessment, and termination of human resources (Nordhaug et al., 1997). Social relations and interactions between management and employee, and among employees, are essential function for the HRM-practice (HRP) that maintains a HRM system.

The relations can generally be distinct in two analytic forms of behavior: control and commitment (Nielsen 2009). HRP include both decisions and implementations by human resource strategies (HR-strategies). Both strategies of control by and consent or commitment from the employees, is to support activities that create profit and, in the long term, reshape and develop the organization. (Legge 1955:14). HRM-system includes also aspects of work organization such as the employees` discretion and their well-being (see figure 1).

*Conceptions, measurements and data*

HRM strategies: Commitment and control strategy

An analytical distinction is made between two HRM approaches regarding social processes in HRM-system: a commitment strategy and a control strategy (Walton 1985, Bévort et al 1995, and Nielsen 2008a). Commitment included both individual identify to execute a job and emotionally identify the values and goals of the company (Guest, 1987). As Guest puts it,”organizational commitment combined with job-related behavioral commitment will result in high employee satisfaction, high performance, longer tenure and a willingness to accept change” (Guest, 1987:514). In my opinion, the commitment strategy treats human resources as an investment, and the labour force are regulated in functional flexibility in relation to the company’s need for labour (Nielsen 2012, Atkinson 1995). According to this concept, employees are expected to involve themselves in the development problems of the organization, and the management is concerned with developing qualities (discretion and trust) in working life and production as a precondition for optimizing performance. The actions take place through formal and informal social relations between managers and employees, between colleagues, and between subordinates and superiors in the organization. Management supports competence development of employees and uses soft HR-technics, for instance motivation and communication. Futhermore, the work organization are designed for team work and learning, mostly to meet changes. Well-being means happiness at work and using potential skills and knowledge.

*Measurements*

Commitment strategy is measured by discretion in working processes (job commitment). The discretion to act in work life means that the social actions between members motivate and involve the employees. Hence, discretion can be seen as a factor affecting well-being among the employees. The discretion is embedded in the social system and is treated specific in the HRM system of the firm.

That means that management within a HRM-system allocate responsibility and competence to the employees through

• Planning, execution and evaluate and correct the tasks within the working process

• Involvement directly or indirectly in decisions within some areas as change of work organization or skills and competence.

To operationalize commitment strategy by discretion, four items has been used:

In which degree of your working time can you choice or change:

a. Working tasks?

b. Working intensity?

c. Order of the tasks you execute?

d. How you execute your job?

*Control strategy in HRM system*

According to the control strategy, the organization is hierarchical and labour force is perceived as a cost which must be controlled minutely through the allocation of work, through specialization, and through the clear division of authority. Depending on the company’s need for labour, the labour force is regulated numerically. The control strategy has its inspiration from principles of Scientific Management F. W. Taylor (1911); that means to separate planning form execution of work, to design job with small degree of demands and learning, and to control employee performance. Taylor did not like that management should organize work on the basis of social relations because worker develops systematic soldiering in working processes. The individual worker should be aligned to the single job and should be rewarded by their performance in accordance with the goal of the firm. This idea is founded in the HRM scholar by “hard” strategic HRM (Fombrun et al 1984:37). The management executes economic control by the individual performance on all levels of the organization. Well-being means to be disciplined to do wage labour role, i.e. to keep up the work, to meet to the clock at work and to submit the authority on the work place and so on (Knudsen 1980).

*Measurements*

The control strategy is measured on both quantitative and qualitative dimensions:

To operationalize control three items has been used

1. Do you in your work find goal that are related to
2. Quantity of the produced or delivered items?
3. Quality for instance rejection or satisfaction of the customer?
4. Are you unable to meet these goals?
5. How often do you work actually with rigid deadlines and how do you compare deadlines to 2009?

*Well-being*

Generally, Warr (2013) conceptualizes that well-being means an emotional condition of the individual i.e. affects or experiences that are “primitive, universal and simple, irreducible on the mental plane” (affective well-being). The affects ”range along a bad-to-good continuum and occur throughout waking life as components of emotions, moods, values, attitudes, orientations, prejudices and ideologies, and are central to well-being in any setting” (Warr 2013:80). Operationalizing this conception of well-being Warr (1990, 1996, 2013) distinct between two dimensions 1. Activation (Arousal) and 2. Pleasure. Both dimensions are measured by positive and negative values within groups: 1. Anxienty (activated negative affect), Enthusiasm (activated positive affect), Depression (Low-activation negative affect) and Comfort (low-activation positive affect).

*Measurements*

Well-being is measured in one head items and six sub items:

In which degree, did you felt in your working time at last week:

1. Aroused?
2. Uneasy?
3. Anxious?
4. Depressed?
5. Gloomy ?
6. Miserable?

Project Meadows (see below) measurements of well-being is using that are operationalized on two negative affective well-being: Anxiety (aroused, uneasy, anxious) and depression (depressed, gloomy, miserable).

Table 1:Well-being: In which degree did you felt in your working time at last week? (percent horizontally)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Newer | More than one day | One to two days | Three to seven days |
| Aroused | 34,2 | 33,3 | 20,9 | 11,6 |
| Uneasy | 68,6 | 19,5 | 8,1 | 3,8 |
| Anxious | 41,4 | 32,7 | 16,0 | 9,9 |
| Depressed | 79,5 | 12,5 | 4,8 | 3,2 |
| Gloomy | 69,1 | 18,2 | 7,8 | 4,8 |
| Miserable | 84,8 | 9,4 | 3,3 | 2,6 |

The first three questions refer to anxiety, but the last three questions refer to depression. Generally anxiety are more spread among employees than feeling of depression. About one third has felt aroused one day or more and more than one fourth has felt anxious one day or more weekly. Uneasy is the lowest spread feeling of anxiety. Among people who feel depression, 8 per cent has been depressed one day or more. One eight has felt gloomy one day or more. Employees who have felt miserable have been spread least.

*Data from Meadow (Nielsen 2014)*

Data that has to be analyzed has been collected from the Danish Meadow survey <http://www.meadow-project.eu/> . This survey integrates information from questionnaires to management and employee on private and public workplaces about various topics of labour and organization. Management has given informations about the context of work place, cooperative relationships, dynamics of organization, human resource management. The employees have informed about work organization, participation, influence and control, education and training, well-being, job security and work-life balance.

The work places that included in the researches have been drawn out from populations of public and private work places with more than 25 employees in four private and two public sectors. 2000 work places have been randomized, stratified. The in formations have been picked up by Danmarks Statistik by questionnaires in the spring 2012. From the side of management, 617 fully answered questionnaires were received that each one represented one workplace. In the table below the results are appeared for six selected sectors.

Table 2. Meadow management survey: Population, selection, replies and response rate

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sektor | Population | Selection | Replies | Response rate |
| Fremstilling | 1.606 | 448 | 141 | 31 |
| Handel | 1.600 | 327 | 92 | 28 |
| Bygge og anlæg | 591 | 185 | 52 | 28 |
| Forretningsservice | 1397 | 389 | 110 | 28 |
| Off. uddannelse | 1475 | 269 | 94 | 35 |
| Off. sundhed | 1563 | 382 | 128 | 34 |
| Alle arbejdssteder | 8232 | 2000 | 617 | 31 |

Kilde: Danmarks Statistik: MEADOW survey: Ledelsesdel. Dokumentation 9. juli 2012

From each of the 617 work places, with totally informations from management, 15 employees have been selected randomized. Every employee has at least more than three years of seniority. The selection of employees has been done in four ”waves” when receiving suitable answers from management in the single firm. Then, the employees were selected. 3362 responses from employees and the response rate was 37,2 per cent. Even though the response rates are rather low, nothing indicates serious bias in the data material.

*Data analysis (Quantitative analyses).*

Analysis of data from MEADOW survey should be extended furthermore, - separated on branches and job typologies in a new version of this paper. So, this is the first level presentation of the data material.

Table 3: Goal that are related to quantity of the produced or delivered items by well-being

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Yes | 19,9 | 42,2 | 37,9 | 1256 |
| No | 17,2 | 42,3 | 40,5 | 1252 |
| Not relevant | 15,2 | 46,8 | 37,9 | 854 |
| Total | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P = 0,026

Weak but significant connection between economic control and well-being: Quantative control increases the possibility for low well-being.

Table 4: Goal that are related to Quality for instance rejection or satisfaction of the customer by well-being

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Yes | 18,4 | 44,1 | 37,4 | 1509 |
| No | 19,5 | 41,8 | 38,7 | 1108 |
| Not relevant | 13,6 | 44,4 | 42,0 | 745 |
| Total | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P = 0,009

Weak, but significant connection between economic control and well-being: Qualitative control increases the possibility for median well-being.

Table 5: Unable to meet the goals by well-being.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Often | 39,3 | 39,0 | 21,6 | 328 |
| Sometimes | 14,0 | 44,7 | 41,2 | 769 |
| Never | 8,2 | 36,5 | 55,3 | 159 |
| Totally | 19,9 | 42,2 | 37,9 | 1256 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = 0,435

Well strong connection between unable to meet the goals and low well-being.

Table 6: How often do you work actually with rigid deadlines by well-being?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Lav | Middel | Høj | N |
| Below 25 per cent of working time | 10,7 | 40,4 | 48,9 | 1221 |
| 25 per cent up to 50 % of working time | 16,9 | 46,4 | 36,7 | 994 |
| Higher than 50 per cent of working time | 25,8 | 44,1 | 30,1 | 1147 |
| Totally | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38.9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = -0,269

Strong connection between rigid deadlines and low well-being.

Table 7: In which degree of your working time can you choice or change working tasks by well-being?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Below 25 per cent of working time | 22,4 | 44,0 | 33,6 | 1374 |
| 25 per cent up to 50 % of working time | 17,4 | 45,7 | 36,9 | 862 |
| Higher than 50 per cent of working time | 12,2 | 41,0 | 46,8 | 1126 |
| Totally | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = 0,190

Table 8: In which degree of your working time can you choice or change working intensity by well-being?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | Høj | N |
| Below 25 per cent of working time | 26,5 | 45,7 | 27,7 | 988 |
| 25 per cent up to 50 % of working time | 17,3 | 47,3 | 35,4 | 904 |
| Higher than 50 per cent of working time | 12,0 | 39,5 | 48,5 | 1470 |
| Totally | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = 0,287

Table 9: In which degree of your working time can you choice or change order of the tasks you execute by well-bing?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Below 25 per cent of working time | 25,2 | 41,1 | 33,7 | 543 |
| 25 per cent up to 50 % of working time | 20,9 | 45,4 | 33,6 | 889 |
| Higher than 50 per cent of working time | 14,1 | 43,2 | 42,7 | 1930 |
| Totally | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = 0,176

Table 10: In which degree of your working time can you choice or change how to execute your job by well-being?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Low | Medium | High | N |
| Below 25 per cent of working time | 25,3 | 41,1 | 33,7 | 514 |
| 25 per cent up to 50 % of working time | 20,2 | 45,0 | 34,8 | 698 |
| Higher than 50 per cent of working time | 15,1 | 43,5 | 41,4 | 2150 |
| Totally | 17,7 | 43,4 | 38,9 | 3362 |

Chisq. P < 0,000 Gamma = 0,150

Positive significant connections between discretion in work and high well-being i.e. (working tasks (gamma.190), working intensity (gamma .287), order of the tasks (gamma .176), job execution (gamma .150).

*Voluntaristic decision in HRM-system (qualitative analysis)*

Both control- and commitment strategies are ideal typologies in a social science meaning (Weber (?), Månson 2000, Collin 1996, Nielsen 2008a). That means HR decisions mixed both control and commitment strategies in the empirical world, but the conception refers to the actions of individual (Nielsen 2008). HR-strategies are embedded in social processes between changing variants of cultural context. At the same time, the social processes are also embedded in formel and informel processes of the society (Nordhaug 1993, Legge 1995, Watson 2004, Boxall & Purcell 2008, Nielsen & Pedersen 2014). Decisions by actors in the HRM-system supposed therefore to follow a voluntaristic behavior with changed emphasizing on pragmatic and goal controlled processes of decisions. Discretion in the voluntaristic model appears on a continuum from large to small scales where different actors of decisions making are involving and participate. As illustrate in table 11, the voluntaristic behavior of decisions in Danish firms, show that management and employees (61%) are included with seriously weight in decisions about planning and execution of the work. That means that the knowledge and skills by the employees are deployed with discretions in the working processes. This argument is seriously for the employer to involve the employee in the processes of decisions, especially when organizations are changing.

Table 11: Organizing the daily work.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Who decides normally planning and execution of the daily work among employees without discretion of management?** | |
| Employee who do the job | 13,2 |
| General management or senior managers | 24,6 |
| Both employee and manager | 60,9 |
| Not relevant | 1,3 |

Source: Meadows Management survey 2012.

Furthermore, the voluntaristic behavior of decision are supporting by the response from management that both employees executing the work (65 per cent of responses) and the general managers (73% per cent of the responses) have the responsibility for the control of quality. The responses of employees confirm this pattern. About 90 per cent by employees supervise the quality of the output of work. About 66 per cent finds that the senior manager or the boss supervises the quality.

The behavior of decisions in the HR work has a voluntaristic meaning on basis of the delegation of management control to the employee (commitment strategy), that induces discretion and well-being in the working life.

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