

# **A Critical Realist approach to understanding the Human Resource Management Practices - Organizational Financial Performance link: Evidence from Nigeria's Petroleum Sector**

by

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A Thesis Presented to the

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT SCHOOL

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

July 2018

We must be prepared at any moment, to sacrifice who we are for who we are capable of becoming.

- Charles Dubois

## **Dedication**

To my Family members: Who were, who are, and who will be.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr. Dermot O'Reilly, Professor John Burgoyne, and Dr. David Simm, all of who have served as my Supervisors. Without their commitments and encouragements, this PhD would not have been completed. I set out on this endeavour believing I can achieve, not just a functional PhD but one that is of a high standard. Your frank critiques and feedbacks have made me a more critical researcher, and a better scholar. I will never forget how Dr. Simm gladly released to me almost all his books on Critical Realism which I used till the end of my PhD; how Prof. Burgoyne would allow me access into his Dropbox and always ask "Is there anything I can help with?"; and how Dr. O'Reilly would painstakingly read every version of my write-ups and pursue any administrative supports I needed and investigate how to help me out on personal issues. I thank you my eminent Supervisors!

I also wish to thank the corporate organisations who gave their space and encouraged their employees to participate in my data collection process and all the individual participants who gave of their time, allowing me to interview and share of their experiences.

I am fortunate to have met along my academic life people who have influenced me towards the pursuit of academic excellence. I cannot name them all one by one but wish to thank all those I sat under at the various institutions I passed through especially during my Bachelor of Engineering degree studies at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria; and during my Master of Laws degree

studies at the University of Dundee, Scotland; I want also to thank Professor Philip Andrews-Speed and Dr. Ambrose Sunny Ochi Okorie who graciously sent the reference letters to Lancaster University when I applied to be admitted to pursue a PhD.

Throughout all my years of schooling, my family has been a pillar of support and encouragement amidst the many, many challenges we have faced as a family. I love you all! Above all, I thank the Almighty God without whose help I would have been unable to complete this PhD.

My completion of this thesis represents what will now become the close of a long and trying period of my life in which I, in the midst of trials and tribulations from various sources, subjected myself intentionally to the cleansing, liberating scourge of a PhD.

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## Acronyms

AC	Affective Commitment
AMO	Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity framework
CR	Critical Realism or Critical Realist
Cf.	Cross reference or cited by
EVS	Employee Value System
DE	Discretionary Effort
GT	Grounded Theory or Grounded Theoretic
HSE	Health Safety and Environment
HR	Human Resource
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRM-P	Human Resource Management – Organisational Financial Performance link
HRP	Human Resource Practice(s)
KSA	Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
KSAO	Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Opportunities to act
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
LTI	Lost time Incident
MBS	Management Belief System
NegAg RB	Negotiated Agreed Rewards and Benefit package
NET	Neoclassical Economic Theory
NORC	Norm of Reciprocity Competition Mechanism
NOR	Norm of Reciprocity mechanism
NPT	Non-productive Time
OCB	Organisational Citizen Behaviour

OB	Organisational Behaviour
OFP	Organisational Financial Performance
OpCosts	Operational Costs
OST	Organisational Support Theory
PINE	Power-Initiated Negotiated Exchange
PINES	Power-Initiated negotiated exchange superstructure
POS	Perceived Organisational support
PEC	Perceived Employee Contribution
PSS	Perceived Support System
PR	Productivity
RB	Rewards and Benefits
RBV	Resource based View or theory
SHRMP	System of Human Resource Management Practices
SHRP	System of Human resource practices
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SDT	Self Determination Theory
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SQCES	Safe Quality Cost Effective Service
TD	Training and Development
TO	Employee Turnover

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## **Declarative Statement**

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by citations and footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

I declare therefore that this thesis is my own original work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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**Abstract**

Existing research on the HRM-P link has been unable to establish whether or not an HRM-P 'link' exists. Research reviewers have given factors such as inadequate theory, weak research design, and inappropriate methodology as responsible for the research problem. I argue that at the root of the problem is (a) a lack of theory underpinning research in the area, coupled with (b) a neglect of meta-theory. To overcome this, I integrate theories that may contribute to an explanation of the HRM-P 'link', and a meta-theory that might help gain some methodological clarity apropos data collection and data analysis. I argue for an alternative approach - a Critical Realist approach to solving the problem. Drawing mainly on Institutional approaches (comprising modified versions of Transaction Cost Economics theory, Social Exchange theory, Organisational Support theory, and the Resource-Based view; and Institutional theory) whose components constitute a newly developed integrated theoretical framework, I conduct empirical research to answer two

questions, simply put: Is there a HRM-P 'link'? ; If yes, what causal mechanisms mediate the link? Based then on a Critical Realist descriptive and interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study research design, survey data was collected by administering questionnaires on and interviewing employees and managers in a case study of three Nigeria-based petroleum companies with service capabilities. Data was analysed using an integration of existing Critical Realist data analysis frameworks with the core elements of a classical Grounded Theory data analysis technique. The empirical research finds that there is a HRM-P 'link', highlighting that human resource practices (HRPs) causally tend to influence organisational financial performance (OFP) and other HR outcomes. The causal mechanisms found operating to establish this 'link' are eight mediating mechanisms combining and interpenetrating one another, stimulating the perceptions and emotions of human actors (starting from employees but also influencing managers and clients). These empirical findings are at variance with extant research which suggests that a system of HR practices (SHRP) influences employees through a single-path influence on their skills and motivation and on organisational structures or through only employees' perceived organisational support. Contributions to HR management practice and theory and future research directions are also discussed.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The suggestion by the Resource-Based View (RBV: Wernerfelt 1984; Barney 1991) that an organisation's human resource (HR) can become a strategic internal resource for creating and sustaining competitive advantage had caught on among strategic HRM (SHRM) researchers close to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Walker 1980; Miles and Snow 1984; Fombrun 1984). This was because assets like technology, quality, innovation, research and development, or economies of scale were considered unable to endure as sources of sustainable competitive advantage given that competitors were able to easily imitate them (Becker and Huselid 1998a), exposing organisations to intense competitive pressures globally.

SHRM researchers believe that the embodiment of knowledge, skills, and abilities, and perception-induced discretionary effort in individuals and the workforce constitute human capital (seen as an intangible asset) for the organisation. Also, the formation of social relationships between the organisational stakeholders (majorly employers, employees, and clients) and an organisation's culture are viewed by these researchers as economic rents (accruing from the 'soft' side of the asset) – social capital - that cannot be easily replicated (Liu 2004; cf. Becker and Gerhart 1996). Systems of HR practices are therefore seen as strategic resources having been conceptualised as having features of inimitability and sustainability in their systemic form (Wright and McMahan 1992; Becker and Huselid 1998a).

Soon after HR was embraced by organisations as a strategic resource with competitive advantage, HR departments and functions started facing intense scrutiny as senior management needed them to justify the value of their investment in HR practices (Ibid.). This scrutiny led academia to designing theoretical frameworks and conceptual maps in their bid to understand the outcome of various HR practices (HRPs) and their management (see Wright and McMahan 1992; Wright *et al.* 1994; Jackson and Schuler 1995) and amassing empirical research investigating the relationship between HRPs or a system of practices<sup>1</sup> and organisational performance (Ulrich and Lake 1990; Hiltrop 1996) especially financial performance which is regarded as the preferred performance indicator because it appeals to senior management and is viewed as existing at the strategic level (Pfeffer 1994; Huselid 1995; Huselid and Becker 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a; Katou 2010).

Following this scrutiny a lot of questions and debates around research themes have sprung up in the SHRM sub-field. While not attempting to exhaust the list of questions in the SHRM sub-field, a key question in the debates is: Does a causal relationship between HRPs and organisational performance (otherwise called the HRM-P link<sup>2</sup>) really exist? Related to this question is: If the link really exists, what is the nature of such a link (otherwise called the HRM-P blackbox question)? Other questions are: Is there a 'best HRM system with universal applicability'? (Becker and Huselid 1998a; Pfeffer 1994); and is the strategic impact of HRM contingent on the fit between the HRM system and corporate strategy (Ibid. ; cf. Delery and Doty

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<sup>1</sup> The reader should note that 'System of HR practices' (SHRP) or 'HRM system' or 'System of practices' or 'bundles of HR practices' are used interchangeably as they are the same construct representing the antecedent in the 'systemic perspective'.

<sup>2</sup> HRM-P link is used interchangeably with HRM-P relationship as they mean the same thing. Both can be interchanged with SHRM-OPF in other chapters.

1996a)? It seems that consensus is being built gradually on the research around the criteria for constituting a SHRP and on the issue of fit (Jiang *et al.* 2012) which is why I have not chosen them for this thesis. I have selected the first two questions which touch on the causal relationship between HRP and OFP, interpreted as the potential of HRPs to add value to the organisation (Paauwe and Boselie 2005, 2008; Harney 2009) as the research questions for this thesis. Specifically, the research questions are:

A) Is there a causal relationship/link between HRP and OFP i.e. Does a HRM-P link exist?;

B) If a HRM-P link truly exists, what is the link like, i.e. what is the nature of the 'black box'.

The two research questions are important because their resolution would have a significant impact on the SHRM sub-field. The confirmation of a link would remove the uncertainty with which organisations invest in HRM and identifying and analysing the mechanisms through which HRPs could lead to OFP and other HR outcomes would strengthen the hands of HR strategists and implementers as far as HR interventional measures go in the organisation. Further, there is far much more work needed to throw research light on the HRM-P blackbox than on the other questions. Besides that, the issues surrounding the selected research questions are challenging and very interesting requiring, in my opinion, novel approaches to studying them.

Majority of the empirical research investigating the HRM-P link have been committed to positivist meta-theory (meta-theory is concerned with philosophy of science, ontology, epistemology and methodology (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008b), adopting quantitative research designs, and using cross-sectional data mainly sourced from the USA and the UK with few studies collecting data elsewhere. Research reviewers of such empirical research suggest that there is inconclusive empirical evidence for the existence of an HRM-P link, especially given the positivist-based approach which applies statistical analysis to empirical data collected (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006; Wall and Wood 2005; Boselie *et al.* 2005).

Empirical researchers have used different theories to underpin their work (see Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008b for a list of theories that have been used). Recently, SHRM researchers have embraced the Organisational behaviour discipline applying the organisational support theory (OST) and the concept of perceived organisational support (POS) to try to research the alleged relationship (Jiang *et al.* 2013; Liu 2004; Allen *et al.* 2003b). Though the turn to OST - POS has revealed novel mediating and moderating factors between HRP and other outcomes, the problem of providing conclusive 'empirical evidence for the existence of an HRM-P link' remains. Empirical research seeking to establish a link between (loosely put) HRPs and organisational performance, is unable to show that such a link exists. So, the two research questions are yet unresolved. It remains a concern as to why empirical research in SHRM has been unable to conclusively resolve these two HRM-P questions.

The HRM research domain<sup>3</sup> is fraught with many problems, namely, poor or 'thin' conceptualization and inadequacy in theory (Guest 1997; Katou 2010), inappropriate methodological approaches<sup>4</sup> (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006; Katou 2010), and weak and unsophisticated research design (Wall and Wood 2005). There are two reasons for this. First, the research have weak theoretical roots. Second, most of the research are rooted in a vague kind of quasi-positivist/empiricist philosophy of science - Fleetwood & Hesketh (2008b) refer to it as 'scientism' in recognition that it is vague. This philosophical perspective uses quantitative research techniques that presuppose the social world is a closed system (i.e. constituted by regularities in the flux of events) when, as Critical Realists have argued, the social world is an open system (i.e. constituted by a lack of such regularities). This thesis, therefore, uses an entirely different philosophical approach, one that does not presuppose closed systems. The expected research outcome is that by finding the missing theory underpinning the HRM-P link and by selecting an appropriate meta-theory for the problem – a Critical Realist (CR) meta-theory, an appropriate methodology derived will inform the empirical research so that the HRM-P phenomenon could be better explained, hopefully providing more convincing evidence. Elaborating on theory inadequacy, post-2005 reviewers are of the view that the HRM-P debate is stagnating or 'travelling in circles' (Delery and Roumpi 2017; Delbridge and Keenoy 2010) or at a crossroad (Harris 2009a) lending credence

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<sup>3</sup> "From modest starts in mid 1980s the debate has grown into a mature research stream within the HRM field which attracts researchers from all over the world and produces yearly roughly between 50 and 80 papers in ISI Web of Knowledge."(Kase and Batistic 2012)

<sup>4</sup> Katou and Cooke in their reviews argued that research in HRM-P suffers from lack of a unified theory and inconsistent research methodology and note the prevalence of cross-sectional and quantitative data (Katou 2010; Cooke 2009).

to the observation that the discipline is under-theorised (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008b; Guest 1997) and needs to consider other meta-theories including CR meta-theory (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006).

I argue therefore that a mechanismic approach based on CR is a better alternative approach to studying HRM-P. . I represent the problems and the approach I argue for in Fig.1 below.

Accordingly, the research design chosen for this thesis is a CR-based descriptive and interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study. I operationalised an extended framework I developed (an integration of the CR data analysis framework by (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b, Bygstad *et al.* 2016), and Grounded Theory (GT) data analysis techniques) using survey data collected from three case companies in Nigeria's petroleum sector, with one (Wells) as the main case and the others substantiating the data from the main case company. I framed the research based on the integrated theoretical and conceptual frameworks constructed out of five theories (modified versions of four theories, namely Transaction cost economics, organisational support theory, the Resource-Based view, Self-determination theory, and Institutional theory) which I have grouped as 'Institutional approaches'. I shall discuss in chapter 2 below how the relaxation of some key assumptions could mean adding a 'neo' around these theories and why I group them as 'Institutional approaches'.

The ontological depth and epistemological breadth of CR's research approach

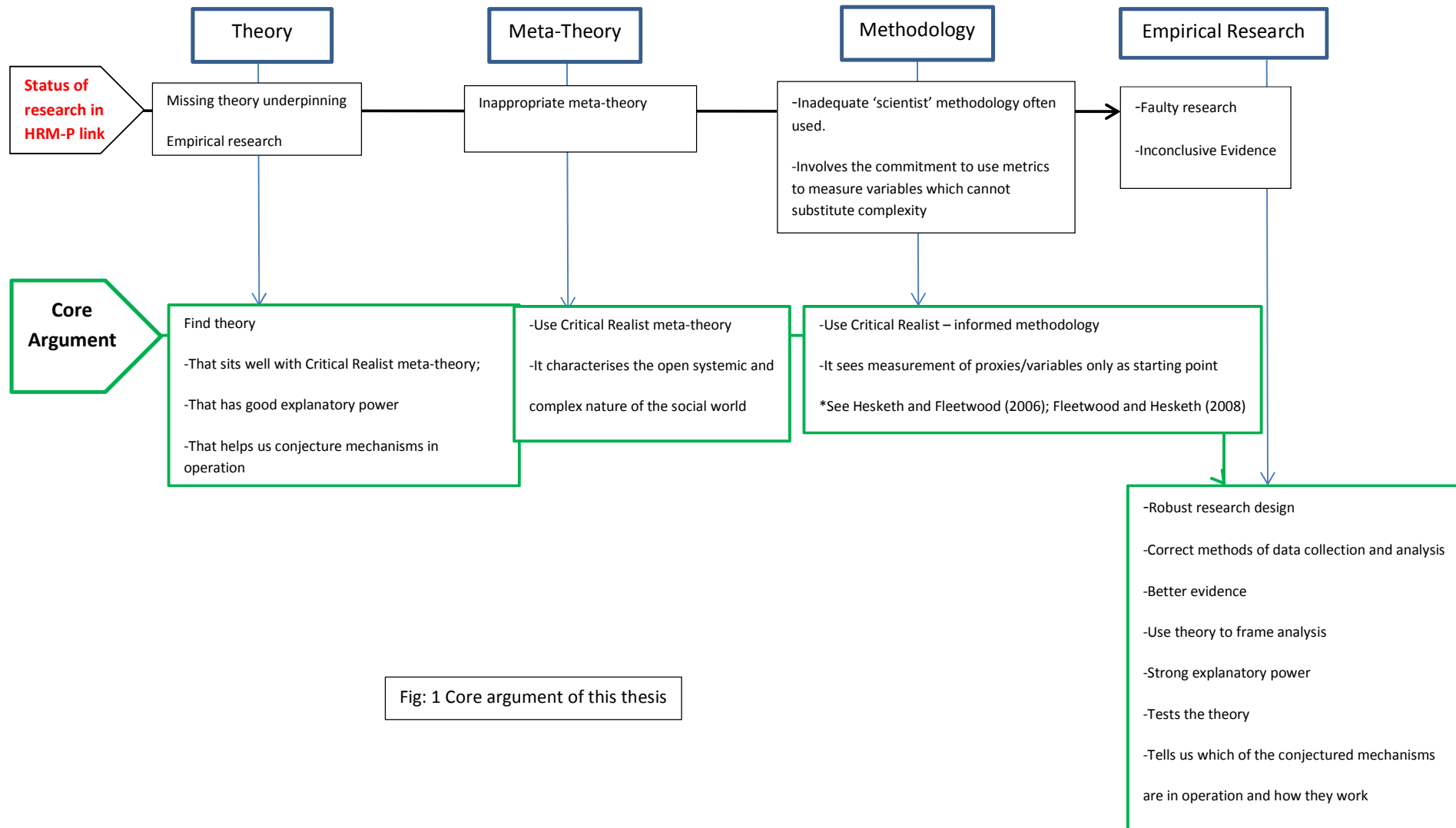


Fig: 1 Core argument of this thesis

with its focus on explanation rather than prediction would afford us an alternative approach to a better understanding of the debate, one that could aid the illumination of the HRM-P 'black box'. Also, using a CR approach (with its realist layered ontology) and the selected research design to study HRM-P gives the possibility of identifying the mechanisms triggered by the SHRP in an organisational setting interacting with many human actors, which may generate various HR outcomes and OFP. Incorporating the GT data analysis technique to a CR data analysis technique can also potentially contribute to developing a substantive theory or modifying pre-existing theories, which further the understanding of the HRM-P phenomenon.

For clarity, it is important to at this point define certain phrases, concepts, and terms often used in this thesis. 'Stakeholders' or 'organisational stakeholders' are used to comprise the employees, managers and supervisors of employer organisations, and clients' agents. 'Level(s)' is used either i) when describing analysis at the level of these stakeholders and are used as 'multi-level', 'multi-path analysis', 'multi-path influence', organisational level, 'analysis at emergent levels' or ii) when describing levels of reality e.g. empirical, actual, and real levels.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, I review the literature in three parts – a substantive literature review, a meta-theoretical literature review, and a review of theories underpinning HRM-P research. Given that there is an extensive substantive literature in the SHRM discipline, I adopt a review strategy which focuses on the key themes and approaches around which research in HRM-P has been organised in the context of the research problem. Focusing on them

throws up issues, contentions, problems, and challenges in SHRM theoretical and empirical research, revealing the gaps in the literature. The different problems/factors and issues contributing to the key problems of i) lack of theory for empirical research in HRM-P; ii) weak research design and iii) inappropriate methodology are thereby reviewed critically in sections 2.2 to 2.4. In section 2.5 under meta-theory, I compare the features and assumptions of CR with competing philosophical perspectives that could be used to investigate the HRM-P phenomenon. Compared with other perspectives, I argue that CR meta-theory is a better alternative meta-theory for informing empirical research in the HRM-P link, suggesting that a mechanistic view for studying HRM-P be explored within a Critical Realist approach. Next, I discuss the theoretical underpinnings of HRM-P link research in section 2.6 reviewing five theories, exploring what could be the adequate but missing theory. Not finding a theory which in isolation is adequate for empirical research in the paradigm, I decided to construct an integrated theoretical framework in section 2.7. By grouping the reviewed five theories under the heading 'Institutional approaches', that is constituted by modified versions of Organisational support theory, Self-determined theory, Transaction cost Economic theory, and the Resource Based view, with Institutional theory as reference theory, I construct an integrated theoretical framework which informs/guides the rest of the research process. The CR meta-theory discussed in section 2.5 informs the methodology and the empirical research.

In Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, I describe the rationale for my choices of methods and techniques. Specifically, I describe and try to justify the

decisions concerning the elements of the research design, especially the rationale for the research strategy in section 3.2. A methodology informed by a CR meta-theory can provide a robust research design shorn of some of the weaknesses of designs based on mainstream approaches. With it, the research outcome will be the explanation and understanding of a phenomenon, not focusing on its prediction. The research process is a Critical Realist descriptive-Interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study research with retroduction. Retroduction is a mode of inference preferred in CR, one where the analyst, in thought, reaches beyond the surface of events to the depths of social structures and mechanisms thereby linking the event or data to invisible structures. It is 'a key form of thought operation in theorizing and theory generation' often leading to concept formation (Fleetwood 2013: p149). One of the implications of the design in the process is the need for a rethink of mainstream research methods. I argue that along this line explicit methods for, not just CR data analysis, but also for data collection are needed. The methodological criteria concerning data collection and analysis were treated in sections 3.3 and 3.4. I finally discuss the research evaluation techniques, ethical issues, and outline the limitations of the research process in sections 3.5 to 3.7 and summarise the chapter in section 3.8.

In Chapter 4, I describe the CR data analysis technique. By making more explicit the steps in Bygstad and Munkvold's (2011b) CR framework for data analysis and adding the core elements of classical Grounded Theoretic data analysis techniques, I develop an extended framework for CR data analysis. The extended framework is very close to what some scholars have called a CR grounded theoretic

data analysis or critical grounded theory (see for example Belfrage and Hauf 2015; Oliver 2011). The process for CR data analysis is hinged on its focus on the identification of mechanisms, and on abstract conceptualisation and retroduction.

In Chapter 5, I implement the extended framework for CR data analysis described in chapter 4 using data collected from three service-focused companies in the petroleum industry in Nigeria. Employing what I term 'data-analytical triangulation' in the GT-CR data analytic (extended) framework, I explore codes and concepts and categories via GT analysis, and then identify explanatory mechanisms based on the retroduction step of (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b) using the same data set. Finally, I validate the results by framing the data analysis using the integrated theoretical framework earlier constructed in chapter two. With a data-analytical triangulation the researcher might have insight as to the suitability or not of the collected evidence (data) and the replicability of the findings. I conclude the chapter by reporting the findings. In the main, I found that a SHRP causally tends to impact OFP and other outcomes such as productivity and turnover. Mediating the SHRP-OFP relationship are at least eight distinct but combining-interpenetrating mediating mechanisms.

In Chapter 6 – the discussion chapter - I interpret the findings reported in the previous chapter and discuss them. I interpret the findings and their significance in the context of the research questions and research problem. I make attempts to provide causal explanation for each finding.

In Chapter 7, I draw conclusions from the findings and answer the research questions, placing them in the larger context of the HRM-P literature. My main

argument is that a SHRP causally tends to influence OFP and other outcomes such as productivity and employee turnover mediated by distinct HRM mechanisms, which are moderated by other mechanisms. The characteristics of this link, inferred from the findings, are the existence of mediators for the SHRP-OFP relationship in the form of at least eight distinct but combining-interpenetrating HRM mechanisms. In follow-on sections, I indicate the potential contributions of the findings to literature and theory. Further, I discuss the implications of the findings to managerial practice and suggest future research directions. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the findings followed by my reflections and concluding statements. With this introduction done, I proceed to review the HRM-P literature in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

Human resource (HR) - the people in the organisation<sup>5</sup> - is viewed as a strategic internal resource for creating and sustaining competitive advantage (CA) (Becker and Huselid 1998b). The possible reasons for this view are four fold. First, since the early 1990s, drawing on the Resource based view (RBV) theory (Wernerfelt 1984; Barney 1991), researchers have started placing value on HR as a firm-specific asset which is inimitable and non-replicable by competitor organisations. Second, researchers started to realise that individual employees or the entire workforce embody knowledge - skills - abilities (or competences), and discretionary effort, further developed by researchers as constituting 'human capital' for the organisation. Third, there is the realisation that the interaction of employers, employees, and clients referred to in this thesis as 'organisational stakeholders', with the organisational culture, results in the formation of social relationships, seen as the 'soft' side of the asset or 'social capital' (Liu 2004; Becker and Gerhart 1996). Lastly, another aspect of this developing view is that HR as an asset, for the most part, could be located or 'made'/produced internally within organisations where there is no competition for the asset and where they are contract - governed as against being located outside or 'bought' externally from the markets, faced with intense competition for their ownership.

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<sup>5</sup> I will use 'firm' or 'Organisation' interchangeably.

Soon after HR became linked to the strategic fate of the organisation especially through RBV-informed research, HR departments and function started facing intense scrutiny and they needed to justify their strategic position with senior management (Becker and Huselid 1998a). In the last decade or so, many CEOs have started seeing the HRM function as a 'cost centre' (Ibid.) and even commenced the outsourcing of the function (Ulrich 1997; Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006). As would be expected, theoretical and empirical research investigating the relationship between HRPs or a SHRP<sup>6</sup> and organisational performance especially financial performance have burgeoned (Pfeffer 1994; Huselid 1995; Huselid and Becker 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998b; Katou 2010). In attempts to justify the value of the HR function, a lot of questions and debates around research themes have sprung up in the SHRM field. Key debates have been: 1) to determine whether or not HRPs or systems (or bundle) of HRPs are causally related to some desired outcomes including OFP. This is called the HRM-P link or existence debate; 2) if indeed there exists such a link or relationship, what is its nature? This is popularly referred to as the HRM-P 'blackbox' question or debate. Another way of asking the question is to ask: By what mechanism does a SHRP impact firm performance?; 3) Is there a 'best HRM system with universal applicability'? (Becker and Huselid 1998a); 4) on the question of whether the strategic impact of HRM is contingent on the fit between the HRM system and corporate strategy (Ibid.; cf. Delery and Doty 1996a); and 5) the issue of 'under-theorisation of the SHRM discipline' (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008a) including the dearth of rich theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpinning

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<sup>6</sup> The reader should note that 'System of HR practices (SHRP)' or 'HRM system' or 'System of practices' or 'bundles of HR practices' are used interchangeably as they are the same construct representing the antecedent in the 'systemic perspective'.

empirical research on the HRM-P link (Wright and McMahan 1992; Guest 1997; Katou 2010; Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006). The debate list is by no means exhausted here. Debates or questions 1 and 2 which touch on the causal relationship between HRP and OFP constitute the core of the research problem for this thesis. These questions have been selected firstly because their resolution could help resolve the debate about inconclusive empirical evidence for the existence of a HRM-P link (Ibid.: p678) being advanced by reviewers of SHRM empirical research. Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) noted that there might exist 'some kind of causal connection' even when we cannot demonstrate an 'empirical association' between HRP and OFP. Secondly, these questions are of strategic implications to the value of investment in HRPs and management. Besides, it seems that consensus is being built gradually on the research around the criteria for best practices and for constituting a SHRP and on the issue of fit (Jiang *et al.* 2012). In other words, it seems that there is far much work needed in throwing some light on the blackbox than in the other questions. In totality, the issues reviewed in this chapter cover the substantive HRM-P literature, meta-theory, and the theoretical underpinnings of HRM-P research.

Having introduced the area of academic literature reviewed, the remainder of this chapter is divided into three main parts – the review of key themes in substantive literature in sections 2.2 to 2.4, a brief review of the paradigm and the meta-theoretical literature in sections 2.5, and the theoretical underpinnings for SHRM research in the context of the research problem resulting in an integrated theoretical framework in sections 2.6 to 2.7. In section 2.2, I discuss the key themes

and approaches around which research in HRM-P<sup>7</sup> has been organised. These themes and approaches throw up issues, contentions, problems, and challenges in SHRM theoretical and empirical research culminating in the verdict of inconclusive evidence for empirical research about the existence of a HRM-P link. In section 2.3, I highlight how SHRM reviewers have deconstructed the inconclusive evidence problem reviewing the problems that led to it and its ramifications. I make my contentions and make my core argument concerning the debate in section 2.4. Arguing for a change to alternative meta-theory, in section 2.5, I argue for a CR meta-theory highlighting its concepts and why it can answer the research questions and solve the research problem. In section 2.6, I discuss the issue of a lack of adequate theory underpinning HRM-P link and review and assess five relevant theories underpinning HRM-P research. Following the review of the theories, and finding none of the theories adequate for the problem, I establish grounds for combining theories with different meta-theories and then construct an integrated theoretical framework in section 2.7. I summarise the chapter in Section 2.8 restating the research questions in the context of the theoretical framework and suggesting where I hope to potentially make original contribution to knowledge.

## **2.2. Research Themes and Approaches in the SHRM Literature**

There is an extensive literature on the debate about the human resource management practice organizational performance link (Gardner and Wright 2009). It is a daunting task to collate all the articles existing and to review them within a thesis

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<sup>7</sup> The 'P' or 'OP' used in HRM-P/HRM-OP is intended in the discipline to mean organisational performance (even though intermediate outcomes like employee or team performance can be implied) with specific interest in Organisational financial performance (OFP). I use OFP to be specific about the organisational outcome of interest for this study.

chapter. Instead of adopting the strategy of “covering the field” and producing non-critical reports, I rather focus here specifically on studies, themes, and theories of particular relevance to my research problem (see Maxwell 2005b). In order to build a map of the conceptual and theoretical domain and research perspectives utilized around the research problem, I have compared and tried to link a few leading studies as well. I compared Becker and Huselid (1998a) and Jiang *et al.* (2012) to consider the HRM system construct and the OFP construct to see how researchers used these constructs. I have also compared the reviews by Wall and Wood (2005) and Boselie *et al.* (2005) to find commonalities and differences.

Researchers have used different themes to study the effects of HRM on organisational performance (otherwise known as the HRM-P link). Rogers and Wright (1998) outlined academic research that attempted to link HRPs to organisational performance citing Russell *et al.* (1985) who tried to link ‘individual HR practices in training’ and Milkovich and Milkovich (1992) who linked compensation to firm financial performance. Huselid (1995) examined the link between ‘systems of HR practices’ through ‘an index of HR practices’ (a SHRP) to financial performance while MacDuffie (1995: p312) studied links between ‘bundles of HRP’ and ‘productivity and quality’. My objective therefore is to critically review the literature by exploring eight themes, categorized into debates, questions, and research approaches, bringing out the issues and problems arising, including the gaps in the literature. These include: the strategic view of HRM, choosing between isolated HRPs or HRM System as antecedent, how are HRM systems constituted?, what are the consequents?, how has research operationalised different key constructs?, the notions of ‘HRM

blackbox' and link, SHRM results/findings, and the problem of inconclusive evidence for the existence of a HRM-P link.

### 1) The strategic view of HR (SHRM)

The Resource based theory has been predominantly used to research the strategic value of a firm's human resource as source of competitive advantage where researchers have explored whether it has the attributes of being valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable.

A firm's workforce and its HRM systems for managing the workforce, are viewed by SHRM researchers as valuable assets to be strategically managed (Pfeffer 1994) rather than costs to be minimized (Becker and Huselid 1998a). For these reasons, certain HRPs are viewed as organisational performance enhancers (Combs *et al.* 2006b; cf. Schuler and Macmillan 1984; Russell *et al.* 1985).

Related to the strategic attributes is the question of whether systems of HR practices have inimitable attributes, a property that enables them, it is believed, to provide the organization with sustainable competitive advantage (Becker and Huselid 1998a). There has also been the debate of whether it is the isolated HR practices or the systems of practices that hold the value of this asset.

### 2) Isolated HRPs or a SHRP as antecedent?

A HR system has been defined as "the pattern of planned human resource activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals" (Wright and McMahan 1992: p298). With regard to HRM-P models, researchers debate on what

should form the antecedent – isolated and independent HRPs or a SHRP. Related to this is the question of what should be the components of such a system.

There has also been a debate on what should be the consequents, mediators and moderators in such a model (Jiang *et al.* 2013). I consider these debates and questions in the next sub-sections below. A good number of SHRM researchers hold the view that a SHRP (also referred to as ‘bundles of HR practices’, ‘HR system’ or ‘system perspective’ or ‘system focus’) is preferred over isolated and independent individual HRPs and policies (Huselid 1995; MacDuffie 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a; Jiang *et al.* 2012). The isolated practices are conceptualised as ‘a collection of multiple, discrete practices with no explicit or discernible link between them’, while a SHRP is conceptualised as ‘an integrated and coherent bundle of mutually reinforcing practices’ (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p6). The stated reasons for this preference are: 1) HRPs are rarely implemented individually in isolation, rather they come together as a system, and are normally purposefully designed to achieve the organisation’s strategic goals (Jiang *et al.* 2012; cf. Wright and Boswell 2002; Lado and Wilson 1994). It is in the systemic form that the alignment with organisational strategy is deemed possible (Ibid. ; cf. Huselid 1995; MacDuffie 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a); 2) Elements of HR systems can have good internal or horizontal fit when they complement one another or externally fit or be vertically integrated when they are aligned with the organisation’s strategy. It is held that these are characteristics that isolated HRPs cannot have (Boselie *et al.* 2005; Delery and Doty 1996a; Wright and McMahan 1992). Researchers believe that with fit and alignment, a SHRP can have greater effect sizes on desired outcomes (Subramony 2009;

Gooderham *et al.* 2008; Combs *et al.* 2006b). Comb and colleagues for instance had used meta-analysis to 'estimate the effect size and test whether effects are larger for (a) HPWP systems versus individual practices, (b) operational versus financial performance measures and (c) manufacturing versus service organizations'. Godard (2004) argued that claims that High performance work systems (a version of a SHRP) 'yield superior performance outcomes may be unwarranted' noting that they found conventional explanations for these findings to be insufficient. This last argument needs further research to become an acceptable claim. Such a researcher may be giving more insight as to the causal powers of a SHRP versus isolated practices; it may reveal the impact of contextual mechanisms to the outcome of a SHRP or isolated practices.

### 3) How are HRM systems constituted?

Having preferred HRM systems as antecedent in the models, the debate on which HRP should form components of an HRM system appears unresolved (Boselie *et al.* 2005; cf. Lepak and Snell 2002). No two HRM systems are identical, for instance, the 8-item list by (Delery and Doty 1996a) and those by (Ichniowski *et al.* 1997) share only four items in common (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p7) and there is, as yet, no consensus as to what should be the nature of a HRP or its system because there is 'no widely accepted theoretical rationale for selecting practices as definitively essential to HRM' (Ibid,: p6; Jiang *et al.* 2012) and for selecting those added to a HR system (Boselie *et al.* 2005; cf. Wiersma and van Den Berg 1999). Nonetheless, some researchers have constituted their versions of HR systems. For example, a version used by Becker and Huselid - High performance work systems - are 'generally

thought to include rigorous recruitment and selection procedures, performance contingent incentive compensation systems, management development and training activities linked to the needs of the business, and significant commitment to employee involvement' (Becker and Huselid 1998a). Liu (2004) included versions of Training and development practices (TD) and versions of Rewards and Benefits practices (RB) as primary elements of an 'internally consistent and externally aligned' HR system he called 'progressive HR practices'.

From their review, Boselie and colleagues found that the top four HRPs researchers always selected in descending order were 'TD, contingency pay and rewards schemes, performance management (including appraisal) and careful recruitment and selection' (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p6). They did not state how the rating was arrived at.

But recently, Jiang *et al.* (2012) cf. Delery (1998) promoted particular criteria for linking or bundling HRPs with one another as synergistic, substitutive, and additive relationships. According to them, a synergistic relationship exists among HRPs if the practices 'work together interdependently such that the effectiveness of one practice depends on other practices in place'<sup>8</sup>. Building on Delery's work, Jiang *et al.* (2012) has provided an attitude-motivation-opportunities to contribute (AMO)-based framework that can be used to select constituent HRPs and /or policies based

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<sup>8</sup> Other types of relationships among HRPs according to Jiang *et al.* (2012) cf. Delery (1998) are additive and substitutive. Two HRPs in an additive relationship 'might generate greater effects on an outcome than either one used alone'; even though 'the effects of using two practices together are not more than the sum' of their individual effects and 'the effect of each practice is sufficient in isolation and is not dependent on other practices'. A substitutive relationship exists when one HRP is substitutable with another practice so that using two practices together does not have a greater effect when compared to their individual effects. In other words, adding one HRP that has a substitutive relationship with another HRP will only increase operational cost (Jiang *et al.* 2012: p76-7).

on whether they fit into any of what they termed 'three HR policy domains' - 'knowledge, skills and acquisition (KSA)' policy domain, 'motivation and effort' policy domain, and the 'Opportunity to contribute' policy domain - each having a non-interchangeable impact on the HR system (Ibid.). Consistent with these researchers, I select a matched TD+RB comprising of these two often-mentioned HRPs (constituting a SHRP as noted above and connoting what other researchers and practitioners call 'effective RB system'. In this case, TD and RB are assumed to be in a complementary or 'synergistic relationship' in a system.

My part objective while considering the research question would be to conceptualise the internal synergistic relationship among the two practices (i.e. whether TD and RB are internally consistent and externally aligned with strategy when constituted as an organisation's SHRP) and to try to understand how they as a bundle or a system may impact OFP. TD which fits in the KSA policy domain may be posited to be effective and highly valued by employees when the organization adequately compensates them commensurate with the level of training they have undergone, and the RB which fits into the motivation and effort policy domain may be posited as effective when matched to a worker's productivity which is related to the training-related competences acquired.

#### 4) Consequents

The choice of antecedents is evolving and still being debated but the consequents (HR outcomes, organisational outcomes, even the mediating factors) are also being analysed. The consequent was initially conceptualised as performance, mediated by skills and motivation, and presently as performance,

mediated by employee perceptions of the HRPs and influenced by the social relationships of the stakeholders in the organisation as will be recounted below. These shifts in conceptualisation have been informed by researchers shifting focus between what has been termed macro theories (e.g. RBV, Contingency theory) and micro theories (e.g. OST, SET, AMO). HRM systems were initially conceived as influencing individual and organisational performances by directly affecting first, employees' skills and motivation, then attitudes and behaviours (Pfeffer 1994; Huselid 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a). Jiang *et al.* (2013) listed the 'wide variety of performance measures' being used by researchers as individual employee performance, group performance, and organisational performance at various levels of analysis – e.g. "plant -, business-unit, and firm-level of analysis" (p1448).

Organisational performance can be divided into operational and financial performance measures (see Combs *et al.* 2006b). Many researchers consider financial measures to be the 'dominant' success indicator of interest and important measure of organisational performance for senior management since it exists at the strategic level (Boselie *et al.* 2005; Ichniowski *et al.* 1996; Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006; Huselid and Becker 1995). Boselie and colleagues reported in their review that 50% of the 104 articles they reviewed used financial measures with profit and sales coming first and second and that service quality and productivity feature greatly as proximal (or intermediate) outcomes. Other measures used to represent outcomes or dependent variables include effectiveness, efficiency, development, innovation, quality, and satisfaction (Katou 2008). Boselie *et al.* (2005) specifically observed that only two studies out of 104 reviewed - studies by Gelade and Ivery (2003); Rogg *et al.*

(2001) - examined outcomes from the perspective of customers (p8). For the reasons adduced by researchers as above, in this thesis, I have used OFP as the terminal outcome.

5) How then are HRPs or systems of HR practices and OFP constructs operationalised in empirical research?

The theories underpinning the majority of the empirical researchers in SHRM are committed to a positivist meta-theory. Presupposing the social world as a closed system (where there is a constant conjunction of events or event regularity), instead of the open system it is (no constant regularity), researchers selecting them use simplified quantitative models to represent our complex social world. Following this, concepts (constructs) postulated in their conjectures are usually measured. For example, measures of HR system, organisational performance, HRPs, etc. are used in models as the variables upon which mostly statistical procedures are applied. For quantitative researchers, antecedents like TD and RB are measured as independent variables and OFP as a dependent variable and applied to statistical models. Criticising empirical techniques where proxies are used as measures of constructs while associating them statistically, Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) suggest that 'a more discursively reflexive approach to data collection' is what is required to access structures, mechanisms, powers and tendencies in order to obtain the explanation of phenomena (p679). Trying to quantify and measure constructs that are qualitative and social they argue, draws from a wrong meta-theory which informed the faulty methodology (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006a). Related to that, questions of what exactly should be measured in HR systems and how to measure them remain in

debate (Jiang *et al.* 2012; cf. Lepak *et al.* 2007; Paauwe 2009; Posthuma *et al.* 2013). Space constraints do not permit me to delve into the debate on measurement models for HRM systems here. Readers interested in the debate can compare the studies by Becker and Huselid (1998a) and Jiang *et al.* (2012).

This thesis follows suggestions by Fleetwood and Hesketh by using a Critical Realist approach whose meta-theory is different from a positivist meta-theory, hoping thereby to contribute to our understanding of the HRM-P link.

#### 6) The HRM-P link and notion of a 'blackbox'

The link problem has been and still remains an issue in the debate. Boselie *et al.* (2005) reported that whilst most researchers in the SHRM field acknowledge that a 'blackbox' exists, they have 'largely disregarded' it, refusing to look inside the box and proceeded regardless (p9). I disagree with this report especially given that the same authors, in the same page stated:

"We found 20 examples, including Ahmad and Schroeder (2003: - commitment); Gelade and Ivery (2003: - climate); Park *et al.* (2003: - skills, attitudes, and motivation); (Rogg *et al.* 2001: - climate); and Wiersma and van Den Berg (1999: - morale and then employee commitment). Overall, then, "black box" studies conceptualise *employees' perceptions and experience* as the primary mediating variable, and the "signalling" effects of HRM are understood to forge a psychological contract between the employer and employees that shapes these perceptions and experience" (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p9; cf. Wright and Boswell 2002: p261; Ostroff and Bowen 2000).

SHRM researchers have variously researched potential elements of the blackbox devising conceptual models to address the blackbox (see Allen *et al.* 2003b; Liu 2004; Katou 2010; Jiang *et al.* 2013) but what is at issue is whether the models used are adequate to address the complexity of the HRM blackbox. What is a HRM-P

'blackbox'? This is a term used by researchers in the discipline to depict that the nature of the purported link between HRPs and organisational performance (OP) or whatever outcome they select as dependent variable is opaque, i.e. not well analysed and understood. In other words, there is a 'lack of clarity regarding what exactly leads to what' (Gerhart 2005; Katou 2010: p17; Huselid 1995: p667; Becker and Gerhart 1996: p781-2) and why.

Researchers have long conjectured that HRM systems can influence firm performance by influencing mediators residing at 'different levels of analysis' (Jiang *et al.* 2013; cf. Liao *et al.* 2009; Takeuchi *et al.* 2009). These levels could be individual/single- (i.e. employee) level as opposed to multi-level or system (i.e. organisational) level. By investigating what they have called 'the intervening steps in the HRM-performance relationship' or 'the variables mediating or moderating the endpoint variables' (Becker and Gerhart 1996) or the 'mediating mechanisms within SHRM' (Jiang *et al.* 2013: p1449), research light is being thrown on the blackbox. Proximal and intermediate outcomes like skills, attitudes, motivation, discretionary behaviour, productivity, turnover, turnover intentions, organisational commitment; and social relationships like POS and felt obligation are some of the mediators empirical researchers have used in describing the blackbox (see Eisenberger *et al.* 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Katou 2008; Liu 2004; Allen *et al.* 2003b; Huselid 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a; Snell and Dean 1992; Delaney and Huselid 1996; Arthur 1994; Purcell *et al.* 2003). Some moderating factors used in hypothetical models are business strategy, cost, quality, innovation (Katou 2008) and professional commitment moderating POS (Liu 2004). Conducting a meta-analysis

using the ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) framework, (Jiang *et al.* 2012) shifted their focus from level of analysis to consider 'type of mediating path' in the model and found that through different paths, different HRP-types lead to important outcomes – suggesting that 'the components of HR systems are not perfectly interchangeable with one another in terms of the mechanisms of their impact on the workforce' (Jiang *et al.* 2013: p1449). This confirms that models that neglect the complexity of social phenomena and use simple linear models for HRM-P research are bound to produce misleading results as they may not provide needed explanation of what goes on in the blackbox.

## 7) Results: Significant and Surprising findings

### *Significant findings*

Having looked at how constructs are operationalized and the approaches used in the literature, a sample of results and findings from empirical research on HRM-P is necessary at this stage. Huselid (1995's) seminal article, using a sample of 13 high performance work systems (HPWS) and data from many firms across industries in the USA, applying statistical procedures (regression analysis, structural equation modelling) produced results which 'strongly supported the conjecture that a HPWS will have a positive effect on multiple measures of firm performance'. Alternatively, he found 'little support' for the conjecture that practices in internal or external fit are essential to the HRM system. Huselid concluded that the impact of HPWP on OFP is in part due to their influence on employee turnover and productivity (p667). Huselid's level of analysis was system, not individual-level or single level; his perspective was strategic (p636). He addressed two methodological

problems confronting this topic: 1) the simultaneity or reverse causality between HPWP and OP and 2) response bias. He was alert to the danger of using cross-sectional data when causality is involved and noted that though corrections were applied, longitudinal data should be explored notwithstanding that this is costly to achieve.

Liu (2004), investigating the relationship between progressive HRP and OP in a sample of US IT workers and their immediate supervisors, used Structural equation modelling (SEM) and found that employees' perceptions of implemented HR practices, are positively related to their perceived organisational support (POS). Higher levels of POS resulted in lower turnover intention, and a felt obligation to reciprocate with better job performance, increased organisational citizen behaviour (OCB), as well as stronger organizational commitment. The effects of POS on turnover intention, felt obligation, and organizational commitment were moderated by professional commitment.

Allen *et al.* (2003b) studied the impact of perceived HRP as it affects employee turnover but mediated by POS and other factors and found that employees' perceptions of implemented HRPs impacts POS positively and POS mediates their relationships with organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Katou (2008) investigated the relationship between HRM and organisational performance (OP) in a sample of manufacturing organisations based in Greece and analysed the data with SEM. Her result indicates that the relationship between HRM policies and organisational performance is partially mediated by the skills, attitudes, and behaviours of employees, and it is influenced by business strategies.

*Surprising findings*

It would be misleading on the nature of the literature on the HRM-P relationship not to mention some studies that came up with surprising findings. Boselie *et al.* (2005) cf. Ramsay *et al.* (2000) documented that “the negative consequences of HRM attest that some changes in employees’ attitudes and behaviours may not be what the HRM strategy intended” (p11). Relatedly, Pfeffer in his incisive article highlighted that there is ‘pervasive job dissatisfaction, distrust, and disengagement’ in the USA and elsewhere with evidence ‘suggesting that these problems are getting worse’ and that organisations strangely do not implement the practices they know are ‘high performance’ and cost effective (Pfeffer 2007). Boselie and colleagues also cited Godard (2004) who argued that claims that High performance work systems ‘yield superior performance outcomes may be unwarranted, and their implications for both workers and unions are at best uncertain’ noting that they found conventional explanations for these findings to be insufficient (Boselie *et al.* 2005). This finding, many years after Huselid (1995’s) seminal article, confirms that empirical work on the HRM-P link, especially on the constitution of a SHRP, has not reached closure, bringing into question the existence of the HRM-P link. An approach with an alternative meta-theory (e.g. a Critical Realist meta-theory) could be potentially useful in this context. I discuss this fully in section 2.5 of this chapter.

In another surprising finding, the meta-analysis by Combs *et al.* (2006b) indicated a stronger association to financial outcomes than to productivity. Ordinarily, one would expect a stronger association between a HRM system and

proximal, rather than distal outcomes. This, according to Atkinson (2005) may reflect a problem of construct measurement, bearing in mind that the measurement of productivity in the service sector can be particularly problematic, whereas it may be easier to obtain standard, comparable financial data, he reasoned. Guest (2011); cf. Schneider *et al.* (2003) suggests that longitudinal studies seem to challenge some of the findings of most cross-sectional studies in HRM-P, challenging standard assumptions, for example that HRP mediated by satisfaction leads to improved performance, concluding that the opposite direction of causality is a plausible alternative explanation.

#### 8) Verdict of Inconclusive evidence

Though some have referred to the body of literature on HRM-P so far as 'a more convincing body of evidence' touting positive relationship of the HRM-P link (Wright 2003), some reviewers returned a verdict on that body of empirical research as providing 'inconclusive evidence' (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006; Wall and Wood 2005), its evidence as 'promising but only circumstantial' (Boselie *et al.* 2005), and its claim of evidence of association between the two constructs HRM and OP (even with no reason or explanation given) as not translating into a causation (Guest 2011; cf. Boselie *et al.* 2005; Combs *et al.* 2006b). For these reviewers, the claimed HRM link to OP is 'at best an assumption' (Boselie *et al.* 2005). I consider next what research reviewers consider are the key problems leading to the verdict and its ramifications.

### 2.3 Reviewers' deconstruction of the problem of inconclusive evidence

Leading reviewers have argued that the ‘methodological limitations’ and ‘paucity of longitudinal data’ make any claims of a link premature (Wall and Wood 2005; Guest 2011). Guest argued that ‘[t]he holy grail of decisive proof remains elusive’ (Ibid.). Recent research has a more general conclusion, not less critical, stating that the HRM-P discipline is ‘stagnating’ (Kase and Batistic 2012) or ‘moving in circles’ (Delery and Roumpi 2017). I think it is necessary to catalogue here the different problems/factors and issues contributing to the twin key problems reviewers identified – the research design problem and the methodological limitations.

### **2.3.1 Weak Research Design**

Reviewers of empirical research in the discipline argue that a key problem is inadequate, inappropriate and disparate research design, making it difficult to even compare results from various studies (Wall and Wood 2005; Boselie *et al.* 2005). Combs *et al.* (2006b) comment:

‘[t]he wide variety of sample characteristics, research designs, practices examined, and organizational performance measures used has frustrated efforts to estimate the size of the link between HPWPs and organizational performance’ (Combs *et al.* 2006b).

One can argue that plurality can shed light on many different aspects that a ‘uniform’ methodology might miss so that being careful about the approach seems more important than worrying about plurality of methodology and whether they are disparate. Factors responsible for the research design problems are discussed below.

*Single source respondents*

Single-source respondents as opposed to multi-actor respondents give questionable reliability rating as their perceptions are prone to noise and bias (Boselie *et al.* 2005; Wall and Wood 2005; Gerhart *et al.* 2000).

### *Time factor*

In deciding whether to do a cross-sectional or longitudinal design, the researcher is trying to factor in time. Boselie *et al.* (2005) noted that few studies (15 out of 104 articles (14.5%) including Cappelli and Neumark (2001); Pil and Macduffie (1996) have used longitudinal designs; 84% of the 25 studies reviewed by Wall and Wood (2005) were cross-sectional. The cross-sectional designs tend to suggest correlation rather than causal inferences. While longitudinal studies will definitely provide more time for research, few studies in SHRM have had the resources to do so. A thesis of this nature is time-delimited. Studies measuring HRP and OP constructs at the same time are problematic. This is because 'Lag' are investment characteristics and so should be factored in when measuring effects of HR investments (see Huselid *et al.* 1996; Becker and Huselid 1998a; Kato and Morishima 2002). Becker and Huselid (1998a) tested the 'implementation-to-benefit-lag' that might exist for changes in the HRM systems and found that there were effect lags for both the market value (Q) and accounting profits, though they noted that 'the lag was relatively greater for accounting profits (Gross Rate of Return on Assets or GRATE)'. These findings, they continued, cancel any speculation that the positive HRM-P relationship can simply be attributed to the notion of reverse causation (Ibid.: p73). Consider that performance outcomes may even dip over time immediately following a HRP investment (see Pil and Macduffie 1996). Scholars have started to consider time in their studies leading

to considerations of adjectivised concepts like 'future' organisational performance moderated by 'past' organisational performance (see Allen *et al.* 2003b: p114).

Reviewers, in offering solutions to the problem of weak research design suggested that, optimal or 'stronger' research design is seriously needed (Boselie *et al.* 2005; Wall and Wood 2005), but that statement has not been translated into an explicit formulation of how to achieve better research.

### **2.3.2 Methodological limitations**

'Methodological limitations' have been reported by reviewers as being part of the problem in the discipline meaning that findings have 'serious caveats attached' (see Guest 2011; Wall and Wood 2005; Boselie *et al.* 2005; Wood 1999). Three key factors contributing to the limitations which are briefly discussed next are single-level of analysis, neglect of reverse causality, and 'construct confusion'.

#### *Single-level analysis*

Single-level analysis (focusing only on the employee while neglecting the employer and the client) in HRM-P link studies context means organisational processes have not been well analysed and understood and the source of contributions and influence path to Organisational performance are not properly analysed. This partly feeds the problem of HRM-P blackbox. Most organisational theories that focus on understanding human behaviour and relationships and the empirical research drawing from these theories have focused on solely on the employees as human agents (located at the employee level) neglecting the other human agents in the HRM system (e.g. principals and managers at organisational level; and client-agent at

client level) as contributors to the effects or outcomes being studied. To correct this, there is a growing use of multi-level methods where focus is on employees, employer, and client (Multi-stakeholder perspectives have been discussed in Way and Johnson (2005) as a powerful method for understanding the nature of organisations (Boselie *et al.* 2005 ; cf. Klein and Kozlowski 2000a).

#### *Neglect of reverse causality*

Most studies neglect reverse causality in their research designs (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p11). While some researchers have advised caution about adopting the concept since any significant positive relationship between HRM and OFP may only be evidence of high performing, resource-rich organisations proving more willing and able to invest in HRM than low-performing organisations (Ibid. ; cf. Hiltrop 1999). Others like Becker and Huselid (1998a) disagree with the argument given that their test for the 'implementation-to-benefit-lag in HR investments adds to confidence that the positive HRM-firm performance relationship cannot be simply attributed to reverse causation.' (p73).

#### *Construct definition*

Most constructs in the discipline especially the HRM system construct and organisational performance construct, are not well defined and so not well operationalised (see Klein and Delery 2012; Jiang *et al.* 2012)). This construct confusion can only be corrected if more theoretical studies are done to catch up with much of the empirical functional research in the discipline. Dealing with the problem of under-theorisation as suggested by Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) and Fleetwood

and Hesketh (2008b) could bring HRM-P researchers to converge on concepts and constructs. Interested readers can also see Suddaby (2010: p346-57) for more on construct clarity in organisation theories.

### **2.3.3 Ramifications of the impasse - Shifts in the literature**

The verdict that followed the reviews (see especially reviews by Wall and Wood 2005; Boselie *et al.* 2005; Schuler and Jackson 2005; Guest 2011; Jiang *et al.* 2013), and the meta-analytic research (Combs *et al.* 2006b; Kase and Batistic 2012) have resulted in shifts of focus in themes by theoretical and empirical researchers. It could be that the reasons for such shifts are to correct the observed weaknesses in research design and to adopt appropriate methodologies. For instance, SHRM researchers are now factoring in the employees' perceptions and incorporating the effect of social relationships as mediating factors in order to understand the HRM-P link (see Allen *et al.* 2003b; Liu 2004). I have already mentioned that there is also a new emphasis on multi-level analysis covering all stakeholders (Allen *et al.* 2003b; Liu 2004; Jiang *et al.* 2013) (that is going beyond analysing just employees to analysing other agents – clients & employers - who make up the organisational stakeholders) and there are calls to refocus on the 'human' in SHRM (Kamoche 2007)) leading to some researchers replacing HRM system with human capital as antecedent or independent variable. For example, one focus is now shifting from HRP-OP to human capital (HC) - OP. Harris (2009b) studied in his thesis the relationship between HC and Social capital and OP. The HC pool is viewed as an organisation's pool of knowledge, skills, and abilities from its workforce. Related to

that, empirical researchers are tending to qualify what type of dependent variable or outcome they are studying or putting up in their models. 'Performance' as an outcome is now qualified into 'future' or 'past' performance. So, the refrain now is 'HRP are strongly related to *future performance* but they are also strongly related to *past performance*', indicating that researchers are cautious about making any causal inferences (Wright *et al.* 2005). Consequently, there are modifications with the nature of claims being made, especially the causal claims (an example is a claim by (Huselid 1995) where he stated that his results 'strongly supported the conjecture that a HPWS *will have* a positive effect on multiple measures of firm performance', the language 'will have' implying a generalization irrespective of moderating factors, time, and jurisdiction), so we can see that language and presentation are changing. Nowadays, 'correlated' or 'related' is used instead of 'linked' or 'influences' to describe results of these quantitative-based empirical research. Empirical researchers are also being careful to make any causal claims especially given that time and causal order are being factored into the models and longitudinal studies are not yet easily realisable.

These thematic shifts are welcome for an evolving and relatively young discipline but they are pointers to the veracity of the verdict which says that amassed research provides 'inconclusive evidence' for the existence of a HRM-P link and that the HRM 'blackbox' is not yet illuminated. Wright and colleagues point again to the research design as they conclude: 'Better future research designs will provide more conclusive evidence of the true causal order' (Wright *et al.* 2005: p33).

But the reviewers were not explicit on what they mean by ‘better’, ‘optimal’, or ‘stronger’ research design except that one can infer that studies that attempt to minimise the problems with methodology and research design as I analysed above will bring the design to that status. I contend that notwithstanding the laudable effort by various researchers of the HRM-P link to find solutions to the problem, and the concomitant shift in focus, the root of the problem lies deeper than analysed. This leads me to my position in the debate. Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) and Fleetwood and Hesketh (2006b) suggested that a shift towards a non-positivist meta-theory, could start the discipline on the way to reducing the various problems in the SHRM field. This thesis’ research problem, its questions and objectives fall within the wider context of the gaps in the literature. I convey this assertion by my contentions and position in the debate presented in the next section.

#### **2.4. Author’s Contentions and position in the debate**

The HRM-P relationship is much more complex than the models and research designs employed by extant empirical research. Since the reviews and verdict have provoked some reflection amongst SHRM researchers to start considering ontology, they have started exploring multi- instead of single- levels of analysis, and complexity instead of simplified linear models. But, they surprisingly operationalise such shifts in thoughts by falling back into simplified models, unable to escape from this methodological perspective. The reason for this may be because of the bias towards quantitative methodological dogmas.

Labelling the ‘HRM-P blackbox’ as the ‘mediating mechanisms’ in HRM-P link as some researchers have done (Jiang *et al.* 2013; Katou 2010) and yet failing to

study the nature of mechanisms, leads to a simplistic description and modelling of our social world. The assumptions that go with simplistic descriptions influence the models and research designs researchers use, ultimately accounting for the kind of evidence produced from the empirical results. For this reason and more already detailed in this chapter as above, I align with Wall and Wood (2005); Boselie *et al.* (2005) and contend that there is no convincing proof yet of a causal link or even an association between HRPs and OFP.

Empirical research seeking to establish a link between (loosely put) HRM practices and organisational performance is unable to show that such a link exists hence the label of inconclusive evidence and the symptoms of weak design and inappropriate methodology. There are two reasons for this. First, the research have weak theoretical roots. Second, most of these research are rooted in a vague kind of quasi-positivist/empiricist philosophy of science - Fleetwood & Hesketh (2008) refer to it as 'scientism' in recognition that it is vague. This philosophical perspective uses quantitative research techniques that presuppose the social world is a closed system (i.e. constituted by regularities in the flux of events) when, as CRs have argued, the social world is an open system (i.e. constituted by a lack of such regularities). I argue for an entirely different philosophical approach, one that does not presuppose closed systems. The expected research outcome is that by finding the missing theory underpinning the HRM-P link and by selecting an appropriate meta-theory for the problem – a CR meta-theory, an appropriate methodology derived will inform the empirical research so that the HRM-P phenomenon could be better explained with

more convincing evidence. The above contentions feed into the core argument of this thesis whose core concepts and entities are represented in the Figure 2 below.

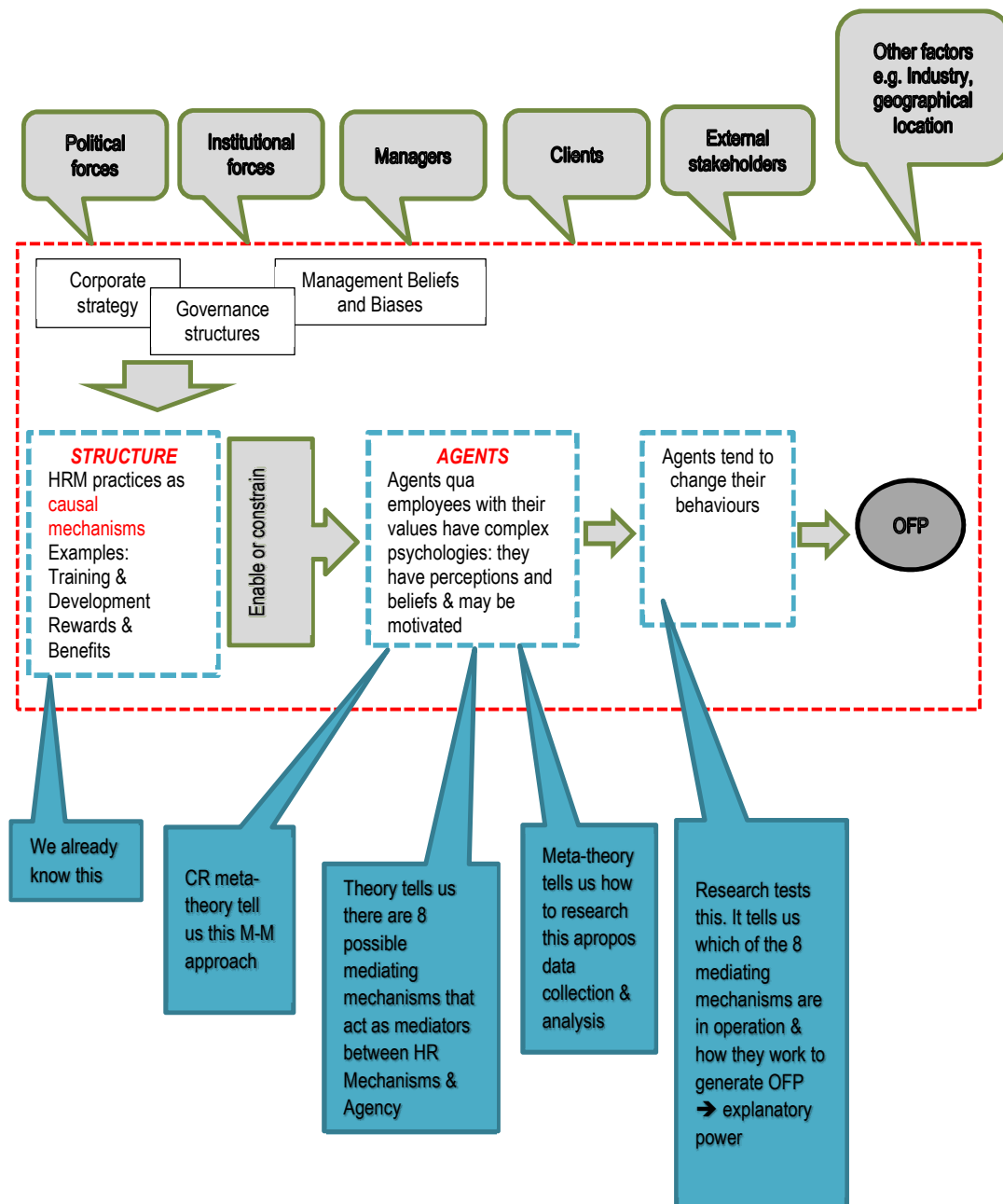


Fig. 2 Core concepts of the core argument of this thesis

The figure 2 above shows a kind of 'core and periphery'. The blue dotted outline (-----) is the core, that is, where the HRM-P stuff goes on. The periphery is what is often referred to as 'context', a term that encapsulates a set of causal mechanisms. Political forces, for example, are just political causal mechanisms that exert a causal influence on owners and controllers of capital referred to as 'context'. The red dotted line (-----) indicates the boundary of the firm, inside which enacted HRPs create or generate whatever they do and agents respond however they may. Corporate strategy, governance structures and Management Beliefs and Biases are variously designed, implemented, and managed by Managers, so are part of 'management'.

This thesis argues that there are different groups of causal mechanisms by different names depending on what they do. For this thesis, we already know that we have TD and RB, HRPs embedded in the super social structure (an idea I develop in chapter 5 below). There are causal mechanisms in the 'core' that serve as mediators between the social structure and human agency called mediating mechanisms which theory tries to reveal. Empirical research tests how many of the mediating mechanisms there are and how they operate in causing OFP. Each group of mechanisms influences the other group of mechanisms in an HRM-P blackbox. There are contextual mechanisms in the 'context' that could moderate the other mechanisms in the 'core'.

This debate about the existence or not of a causal link between a system of HRPs and OFP and the nature of the link where it exists forms the research problem

for this thesis. I have grouped the research questions as ‘the link question and the HRM-P ‘blackbox question’ as below:

A) Is there a link in the HRM-P debate? In other words: Is there a causal link/relationship between HRPs and OFP?

B) If a link truly exists, what is the link like, i.e. what is the nature of the ‘HRM-P black box’?

In the next section, which is the beginning of the second main part of this chapter, I briefly discuss paradigms and then review the meta-theory majorly in use in SHRM research and describe the assumptions of a CR meta-theory, clarifying why it is suitable for this research in resolving the research questions.

## **2.5 Meta-theory**

The research process starts with the identification of the research problem(s), followed by the posing of the research questions, and then by other elements including the conceptual framework (here decisions are made as to ‘what’ (phenomenon) is to be investigated (See Maxwell 2012; Miles and Huberman 1994; Robson 2011). Underpinning every decision in the process is the researcher’s worldview and the theoretical framework which provides the rationale for the choices made at each stage.

Briefly on research worldview, the basic beliefs that underpin legitimate inquiry are called paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln 1998) or philosophical perspective<sup>9</sup>. The 'central question of what constitutes reality' is at the core of one's paradigm. By asking fundamental questions and making assumptions, questions such as: what is or what exists i.e. ontology assumptions (See Delanty and Strydom 2003; Ahmed 2008; Guba and Lincoln 1989: p83); what are the ways to know what can be known i.e. epistemological assumptions (Wiersma and van Den Berg 1999; Delanty and Strydom 2003; Walker and Evers 1988; Ahmed 2008); what is worth being, doing, and knowing and why (axiological assumptions); what tools and techniques are useful to collect and analyse data for the investigation and what time frame is required (methodology) and; how best can the research outcome be shared with others (rhetoric). Because of space constraints for this thesis, I give explicative priority to the philosophical perspective I intend to use for this research - CR - contrasting it with contending philosophical perspectives used by social science researchers, chief among which is Positivism (See Henning *et al.* 2004: p17; Burrell and Morgan 1979; Walsham 1995a; 1995b). Others are Interpretivism (See Walsham 2006; Burrell and Morgan 1979), Social constructionism, and Critical Postmodernism (See Myers 2009; Kincheloe and McLaren 1994; Gephart 1999; Phillips 1990; Cook 1979). Recently, CR made claims to fill gaps left by Positivism and Social Constructionism and is seen by many researchers, worried about the weaknesses of Positivism on one hand and Social Constructionism on the other, as a robust alternative to both (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). I will dwell more on CR in the next section to verify if its

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<sup>9</sup> Some writers prefer to use the phrase 'research paradigm' to represent the philosophical positions which inform the methodological strategies adopted by the researcher to investigate the phenomenon.

assumptions are suitable for answering the research questions. As already argued above, most researchers in the HRM-P sub-field have shown commitment to a positivist meta-theory, a commitment responsible for the problems discussed above (more on this later) and for which a solution is sought. Let me at this point explore what benefits a CR meta-theory offers.

### **2.5.1 Critical Realist meta-theory**

CR beliefs are anchored on their assumptions which can be found in the CR metatheoretical concepts discussed below.

#### **CR Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology**

##### *A Real World*

A real world exists (Bhaskar 1978). '[s]omething is real if it has a causal effect, that is, if it affects behaviour and makes a difference' (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p40). 'Although a real world exists, our knowledge of it is socially constructed and fallible' (Bhaskar 1998; Danermark *et al.* 2002). Reality is conceived as being stratified with entities existing at different strata or levels of reality, and having a 'layered ontology' (i.e. differentiated) where there are three domains - the real, the actual, and the empirical (Ibid.: p199; Bhaskar 1978). The real domain consists of structures of objects (natural and social) which possess causal powers (when they act) and liabilities (when they are acted upon) called mechanisms, which influence their behaviours (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b). The actual domain consists of events generated by these structures and mechanisms. The empirical domain consists of the

experiences of effects or observations men may or may not have/make of the events. I explicate more the key concepts of CR ontology.

### *Open and closed systems*

Our world is an open system (i.e. it is not constituted of constant regularity of events as opposed to a closed system which is constituted of a constant regularity of events), except in few cases where it is a closed system (Bhaskar 1978; Danermark *et al.* 2002: p199). As a result, it is complex and emergent. For open systems, mechanisms are not single but multiple existing layered in levels/strata and are influenced by contexts or conditions which are other mechanisms (Sayer 1992). Causality is therefore hardly linear going by the features of complexity, emergence, and contextuality. Knowledge pooling across ontological layers is therefore hardly additive but synthetic (Bhaskar 2010). I discuss causality in more detail below.

### *Structures*

Structures enable and constrain events; they are not deterministic (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b ; cf. Archer 1995; Sayer 2004). In the CR perspective, social structures exist independently of human action but are reproduced and transformed by human action though irreducible to them.

### *Mechanisms, powers and tendencies*

Objects of the real possess their causal powers as a result of their nature and by reason of their connectedness (relationships of different forms) in a structure and the mechanisms which produce the effects are part of this structure (Bygstad and &

Munkvold 2011b: p42). Mechanisms are described as 'relatively stable structures' often triggered by the interplay of objects of real entities causing the events that we may or may not observe (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Bhaskar 1998). They are referred to as the 'ontological ties that bind causes and effects together' (Harré and Madden 1975: p11) and conceived as 'the ways of acting of things' (Bhaskar 1978: p14). They are viewed as the causal structure 'at the heart of causal explanation' of phenomenon and the 'capacity for behaviour' (Easton 2010: p122; Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Bhaskar 1998). The argument whether a mechanism is observable and whether it occurs in empirical data still poses a challenge for empirical social science research. Though mechanisms may (or may not) trigger or generate events in the actual domain, such events may (or may not) be observed in the empirical domain and so are qualified as 'transfactually active and enduring' (Bhaskar 1978; Danermark *et al.* 2002: p199). While Bhaskar regards mechanisms as always underlying and unobservable, he argued that they can be postulated by the researcher and such postulated mechanisms may come to be known as real (Bhaskar 1978). Sayer argues that some mechanisms will actually be observable and even if un-identified, mechanisms may be hypothesized (Sayer 1992: p107).

Objects by their nature possess powers to do X and not Y. While an object can do X, it may not always be able to do X contingent on certain conditions. Every mechanism has a tendency to produce certain outcomes contingent on certain conditions (Bhaskar 1978: p238). When we come to know the nature of an object, we can deduce its tendency to act in a particular way and not to act in a particular way and statements about how things act (their operation) are called tendency

statements or 'laws' (Ibid.). The concept of tendency is used to denote powers that are produced by things which act in open systems in virtue of which such powers can be exercised but not manifest, and manifest but not perceived or detected by men (Ibid.). Every tendency must have the mechanism it designates and the structures or antecedent conditions that satisfy the mechanism (Ibid.: p231). Therefore, Tendency = Mechanism + satisfying Conditions. Once we know a thing's nature then we can deduce its tendencies (Ibid.: p238).

Another property of mechanisms is emergence. The mechanisms M1, M2 which are subsets of (or associated with) the complex mechanism M may be termed affordances or micro-mechanisms. Specifically, for M In its laminated form, the powers and mechanisms from e.g. the employee level emergently contribute to the stratum above – the mechanism at the organisational level and those at the organisational stratum contribute to the mechanism at the client stratum.

Owing to the complexity of social reality and the fact that 'the observer is fallible' due to the causal liabilities of men, their perceptual constraints and cognitive inadequacies, knowledge of, especially social reality, cannot be fully apprehended. For Critical Realists, a causal explanation (not a prediction) of an event consists in 'identifying the entities and the mechanisms that connect the entities and combine to cause events to occur' (Easton 2010: p122) and describing them qualitatively. Following a CR-informed methodology, the identification of mechanisms is usually during data analysis.

*Nature of causality and causal claims*

There are kinds of causal relations and there are kinds that do not exist in the social world (Fleetwood 2013). *Simple causality* refers to a situation where the cause of an event is simply the event that preceded it. *Complex causality* refers to a situation where the cause of an event is not assumed simply to be the event(s) that preceded it, but rather is 'the entire conflux of interacting causal phenomena.' In dealing with a social system, a complex open system, *tendential causation*, a form of complex causality ('multiply caused and evolving') is usually used by CR because it brings out the role of mechanisms and their tendencies in causation. *Reverse causality* as a concept means an effect has a way of influencing the cause. In terms of SHRM, reverse causality implies that a SHRP is causally linked to OFP or another outcome while the OFP or outcome tends to cause a change in the SHRP. According to existing studies, there have been other attributions to what has been conceived as the reverse causal effect of HRPs. Some researchers suggest that studies measuring HRP and OP constructs at the same time are problematic because 'Lag', such as investment characteristics should be factored in when measuring the potential effects of HR investments (Becker and Huselid 1998a; Huselid and Becker 1996; Kato and Morishima 2002). Becker and Huselid (1998a) tested the 'implementation-to-benefit-lag' that might exist for changes in the HRM systems and found that there were effect lags for both the market value (Q) and accounting profits (lag was relatively greater for accounting profits - Gross Rate of Return on Assets or GRATE). These findings, they continued, cancel any speculation that the positive HRM-P relationship can simply be attributed to the notion of reverse causation (Ibid.: p73). Aside Becker and Huselid, other studies calling for caution in attributing reverse causality are Hiltrop (1999), and Boselie *et al.* (2005: p11). While Gerhart (1999)

suggests the possibility of reverse causation, Huselid and Becker (2000) are not convinced by such suggestions. Guest, in a more recent article, suggested that the claim of evidence of association between a SHRP and OP cannot be translated as causation (Guest 2011; cf. Boselie *et al.* 2005; Combs *et al.* 2006a). Boselie suggested that the claimed HRM link to OP is 'at best an assumption' (Boselie *et al.* 2005). Clearly, SHRM researchers are not confident to make causal claims even if they suggest a relationship between a SHRP and OFP. 'The real problem lies in the way causality is (mis)conceived within positivist philosophy of science and the methods and statistical techniques positivism sponsors' (Fleetwood 2013). For as long as HRM-P researchers remain committed to positivist meta-theory, so long will they continue searching for the kind of causal relation non-existent in the social world (that is, simple causality), and so long will the paradigm remain undertheorized (ibid.) since it neglects to recognize complex causality.

The precedence of Ontology over Epistemology in the search for Knowledge

Critical Realists are strongly convinced of the possibility of identifying reality and coming to have knowledge of it (Bhaskar 1978; Sayer 1992). But they contend that the methods used for exploring the natural world are incomplete for dealing with the 'complex flux' in the social world insisting that ontology must lead epistemology in the search to explore knowledge (Bhaskar 1978).

Axiology

Critical Realists believe in the subjectivity of the researcher - that the researcher is not fully independent of the objects of study especially for social objects. In other

words, there hardly can be complete value objectivity of the researcher in the research activity especially in the social sciences where the researcher's experience and his/her prior knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation are useful sources of information for the research. Researchers' subjectivity is not mere bias as objectivists see it (See Maxwell 2012).

Below, I strengthen further the argument for a CR meta-theory by comparing and contrasting CR with other perspectives especially positivism because most research on HRM-P use 'mainstream approaches', especially positivist-inspired correlations in their research.

### **2.5.2 CR compared and contrasted with other philosophical perspectives**

CR is able to 'accommodate the strengths of both the positivist and constructionist positions while avoiding their weaknesses' (Owens 2011). It holds similarities in ontology with positivism in so far as it agrees that a real world exists independently of the knower and his/her activities and that one can come to have knowledge of it (the notion of 'objective reality'). CR nonetheless rejects positivism's:

a) Reductionist view of the world especially its tendency to reduce the world to observable, measurable objects and facts (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p18,9,40). CR has an emergent view of the world and its approaches underscore synthesis and context (Ibid.).

b) Superficial focus on 'empirical reality', patterns of events, and supposition of law-like regularities. CR focuses on structures and mechanisms not on events. How we

study our phenomena or objects of inquiry or obtain scientific knowledge<sup>10</sup> about them (i.e. our method) must derive, not from the 'actual and contingent' conception of events, but the 'real and necessary' conception of 'structures and mechanisms' (Bhaskar 1978, 1979). CR privileges ontology over epistemology and so argues against positivists' tendency to subsume ontology under epistemology in their search for knowledge and truth - a practice Bhaskar termed the 'epistemic fallacy' (Bhaskar 1978).

c) Empirical realism which refutes the existence of underlying, unobservable but enduring structures and transfactually active generative mechanisms which generate the observable phenomena and events Positivists are enamoured with (Ibid.: p40; 1989: p2).

d) Conception of the world as a closed system without drawing a distinction between the methods for studying the social world and the natural world<sup>11</sup> (Ibid.1978, 1979, 1989). An attribute for a world constituted of closed systems is that one mechanism generates the same outcome every time it is triggered. The upshot is the notion of linear causality held by positivists. Critical Realists' rejection of the notion of a 'linear causality' emphasizes the idea that the outcome of a mechanism is contextual, i.e. it is dependent on other mechanisms so that a key mechanism may generate an outcome in one context but another in a different context. This idea is called

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<sup>10</sup>The 'aim of science is the production of the knowledge of the mechanisms of the production of phenomena in nature that combine to generate the actual flux of phenomena of the world' (Bhaskar 1978: p17).

<sup>11</sup> The problem of naturalism- the problem of whether social objects (especially society and people) can be studied in essentially the same way as natural objects was tackled by Bhaskar. The 'variance' is that he gave two conditions for studying them the same way viz. acceptance of realist ontology and epistemology and respecting the specificity of social-sciences' subject-matter (Bhaskar 1989).

‘contingent causality’ which is inherent in open systems (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Smith 2010).

e) Assumption that regularity or constant conjunction of events can answer the ‘why’ question and serve as a basis for explanation and prediction. This is primarily because positivists do not factor in ‘context’ in the assessment of the event making their aim primarily on event prediction. Critical Realists factor in ‘contexts’ or ‘other mechanisms which influence the generative mechanism’ in the assessment of the event implying that they are not interested in prediction or the uncovering of general laws but in the understanding and explaining of the underlying mechanisms (Bhaskar 1998).

f) Overarching adoption of induction and deduction as modes of inference and ways of making conclusive claims. Critical Realists employ retrodution and abduction instead of induction or deduction as modes of inference because they consider that in open systems, events cannot be accurately inductively predicted or predicted deductively from assumptions, axioms and laws (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006: p691) since contextual situation can change an expected outcome.

A Critical Realist view of the research process would be ‘a constant digging in the ontological depth of reality’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p43). This is because CR’s amenability to a flexible research design provides a methodology for reaching beyond the surface of events to the depths of social structures and mechanisms which generate the events and for addressing the features of complexity of a phenomenon (Fleetwood 2013: p21). The CR insight of a ‘stratified world’ or a ‘layered ontology’ (Danermark *et al.* 2002), especially its provision of a platform to probe the real domain constituted of real structures and mechanisms is powerful for

answering the 'why' questions for events. Using the CR perspective, "causality is expressed in the term 'mechanism', simply defined as a causal structure that explains a phenomenon" (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Bhaskar 1998). The view that CR can serve as an alternative to positivism, social constructionism, Interpretivism, and postmodernism etc. (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009; Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b) is based on the argument that it can serve as a research approach, a research perspective, a social theory, a research methodology (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009), a philosophy (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b, Easton 2010), and a meta-theory (Fleetwood 2013). From the above discussions, I argue that a Critical Realist meta-theory and approach would be a better alternative in answering the research questions and understanding a HRM-P phenomenon than other 'mainstream approaches' used in the HRM-P research.

Aside the problem of inappropriate meta-theory, the HRM-P debate is adjudged by reviewers to be under-theorised – another factor judged to contribute to the problems of inconclusive evidence. In the next part of the second main section, I review the theoretical literature, discussing some of the theories that have been used to underpin empirical research in the HRM-P link. Following that, I develop an integrated theoretical framework for empirical research in HRM-P.

## **2.6. Theories underpinning HRM-P research**

By 1992, Wright and McMahan observed that 'the most glaring void in the SHRM literature is a strong theoretical foundation for examining' organisational phenomena (Wright and McMahan 1992: p315). A decade or so later, other

reviewers observed that many theories and perspectives, numbering over fifty, litter the HRM-P landscape (Alcazar *et al.* 2005; Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006b; Lou 2010).

Some researchers have tried to appraise these theories for adequacy in HRM-P empirical research (see Guest 1995; 2001; Jackson and Schuler 1995; Way and Johnson 2005; Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006b). Decrying a 'lack of theory' or what they called a 'HRM theory' for empirical research in HRM-P, Fleetwood and Hesketh (2006b: p130-6) doubted the adequacy of many of the existing 'theories, models, approaches and perspectives' for providing the 'much-needed theoretical underpinnings' (p133) because some of them are 'narrow and simplistic', based on the presupposition that the social world we investigate is a closed system (that is, event regularities or constant conjunction of events occur therein) when, for the most part, it is an open system (no event regularities occur); are based on false assumptions, for example, Transaction cost economic theory and Resource based view are based on the assumption of human agents as a rational economic man who are seen as ideally rationalist with utility or profit maximizing objectives in their decision-making; and most of them have a metatheoretical foundation not suited to studying the phenomenon of interest in HRM-P research. But the same authors in an earlier article - Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006: p683) - suggested that the HRM-P link can be examined with Institutional theory claiming that it is rooted on a meta-theory similar to CR. Meanwhile, in Fleetwood and Hesketh (2006b: p134), they suggest that some versions of RBV which they did not name may be useful as HRM-P theory even though it is 'beset by its own theoretical problems' being that it is rooted in

neoclassical economic theory's faulty assumption of rationality. What then is the missing, adequate theory for HRM-P research?

### Missing theory

In search of the missing theory, I review briefly below five theories, namely, Self-determination theory, Organisational support theory (which I view as having the social exchange theory and Affect theory of social exchange, and norm of reciprocity applied), Transaction cost theory, Resource-Based view, and Institutional theory. I selected some of the theories for review because of their meta-theoretical adequacy (e.g. Institutional theory, see Fleetwood and Hesketh 2006b: p136; cf. Nielsen 2001); others because of the assumption that they have been developed in the context of understanding business enterprises (as opposed to 'large public bureaucracies') for whom efficiency is an overarching goal (see Jackson and Schuler 1995: p241); but all of them because they give insight into how HRPs can be used to coordinate employee behaviour.

For each theory considered, aside from providing a conceptual map, I highlight how HRP/SHRP by combining with some mediating causal mechanisms (M) might cause employees (managers, and clients too) to feel (perceive, emote, think) Y, and do (behave/act) Z, under certain conditions. Following this, I provide provisional conjectures from each theory and conjecture mechanisms indicated by the theory.

#### **2.6.1 Organisational Support theory**

Because I see Organisational support theory (OST) as a macro-theory of perception, social exchange, and expectations, embodying the application of social exchange theory and Affect theory of social exchange, I discuss the constituent theories briefly as a prelude to discussing OST. Social exchange theory (SET: Blau 1964), which is concerned with human nature and behaviour and the nature of relationships, suggests that individuals upon receiving what they perceive as favours from others are likely to return kind for kind the other party's favour based solely on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960). The norm of reciprocity rule is a relationship rule that posits that a party in a relationship reciprocates to the other party the kind or quality of expense or investment received.

SET is based on the premise that 'human behaviour or social Interaction is an exchange' (Homans 1961: p12-3) particularly of rewards and costs (Ibid.: p317-8) and that social "exchange" is 'an extension of economic exchanges' (Zafirovsky 2005). The 'exchange of benefits, intrinsic and extrinsic, independently of normative obligations' provides the initial impetus for social interaction (Ibid.; cf. Blau 1964: p152-6). Its basic assumption is that individuals establish and continue social relations on the basis of their expectations that such relations will be mutually advantageous (Ibid.).

Social exchange theorists have attempted to 'ground social exchange on market principles' borrowing assumptions, principles and concepts such as perfect competition, perfect information, product homogeneity, multiple firms, rational self-interest in gains, stable homogenous interests or preferences, divisible goods, etc. (Ibid.). But they also acknowledge that 'imperfect knowledge or incomplete

information is present in social relations' (and economic exchanges) and leads to inefficiencies and 'allow that actors have motivations or purposes other than self-interest, viz. altruism, equity, or status' (Ibid.).

Affect theory of social exchange (Lawler 2001) 'includes emotion as part of the exchange process' (Ibid.). Extending the SET, this theory goes a step further to try to show that exchanges generate emotion and feelings attributable to a source (social unit or group) to whom favourable or unfavourable behaviours are directed, including loyalty or affective commitment (Ibid.). I can infer from the SET and Affect theory of social exchange that emotion is a consequence of perception and that they together drive the attitudes and behaviours of humans. By applying SET and Affect theory of social exchange, OST (Eisenberger *et al.* 1986) proposes that 'in the employee-employer exchange relationship, employees who believe they have received high levels of support from the organization tend to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviours that benefit the organization' (Liu 2004). Eisenberger *et al.* (2001), drawing on SET and Affect theory of social exchange, suggested that the social benefits of an exchange relationship can be 'socioemotional resources' such as support or respect or approval, depending on the meaning the perceiver attaches to the benefit. OST 'refers to employees' perceptions about the degree to which the organization cares about their well-being and values their contribution, thereby describing the social exchange relationship' between the employees and the employer organization (Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Liu 2004; Eisenberger *et al.* 1986). By drawing on SET and Affect theories, Eisenberger and colleagues derived the concept of perceived organizational support

(POS). An employee feels supported when he feels the organisation invests in his socio-emotional needs and values his contributions.

OST has its flaws in that it focuses only on the relationship between employees and employers neglecting the other internal relationships in the organisation; it assumes that only the employee needs support and the other parties (organisation and clients with their agents) do not; and by drawing from the norm of reciprocity assumes that employees will always reciprocate kind for kind.

OST (see concept map Fig. 3 below) proposes a tendency of action or response by employees when they perceive good treatment. It misses the propensity of, for example employees who are indigenes of host communities where oil wells are located (otherwise called 'community employees' or 'landlords'), who, though perceiving good treatments and support levels, see themselves as deserving those treatments - it is their rights or royalty being 'landlords' - and may respond positively or negatively depending on their personalities. Parties in a contractual relationship (e.g. agents looking after organisations for Principals), not just community employees, may put up 'opportunistic behaviour'. Organisations may need to design contracts to safeguard against such behaviours as (Jackson and Schuler 1995) noted. OST focused on the motivation of employees and their emotions and feelings, neglecting the motivation of other human agents (e.g. managers, principals, and client agents or representatives). It did not explore how organisations or employers, through their agents or Principals, can be motivated so as to achieve organisational performance.

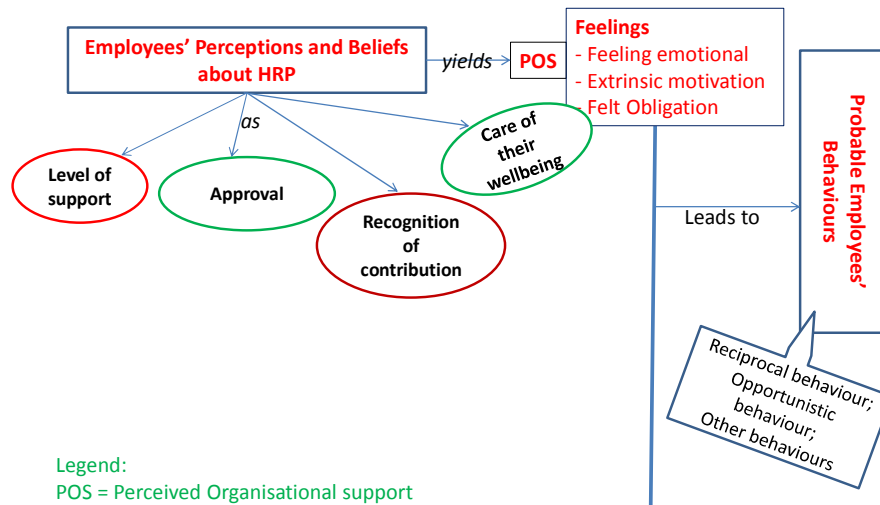


Fig. 3 Concept map for Organisational Support theory

OST focuses on exchange and expectations and the powers HRPs or a SHRP have to draw perceptions and emotions from human agents in the organization. OST suggests that a SHRP combining with a perceptual system might cause employees to first feel supported and then emotional and motivated to reciprocate such perceived good treatment or support for the organisation's goals, provided the employees do not see such treatment or support as their inalienable right. The perceptual system and level of motivation employees and even managers feel may be moderated by their individual value systems (individual psychologies) and beliefs respectively. At least two mechanisms are suggested by this theory. I raise two provisional conjectures based on OST: i) I conjecture that a Perceived support mechanism and an Affect mechanism and a moderating mechanism – Actor's Value and belief system mechanisms are in this theory. In other words, A SHRP is related to OFP mediated by Perceived support system mechanisms, Affect mechanisms, and moderated by Employee value system and Management belief system mechanisms; and ii) HRPs

potentially influence not just employees but all stakeholders in the system. So, while OST can be drawn upon to characterize the relationships between actors in the HRM-P system, in isolation, it cannot adequately explain the HRM-P phenomenon nor answer the research questions in this thesis. Firstly, while employees may perceive HRPs as favours from organisations (though we cannot be certain about this assumption), we are not certain that such perception obligates them to reciprocate such favours (modification of behaviour) in the form of increased work efforts. The theory does not indicate how such reciprocation leads to increased OFP. Secondly, whether employees perceive HRPs and investments as favours from the organisation to be reciprocated or believe the practices are high level support from the organization to be reciprocated does not adequately explain the link between HRPs and OFP. So, there is the need to draw from other theories to cast light on other aspects if we are to obtain a causal explanation of the HRM-P phenomenon.

### **2.6.2 Self-determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT: Deci 1985) is 'a macro theory of human motivation' that proposes that people's experiences of 'autonomy', 'competence' and 'relatedness' result in 'fulfilment' in the workplace suggesting that internal sources of motivation (e.g. a sense of feeling fulfilled) as opposed to external sources of motivation (e.g. rewards) sustain employee 'optimal functioning', productivity and performance (see McDaniel 2011). The theory relates needs such as 'people's growth tendencies and other innate psychological needs' to internal sources of motivation that drive autonomous decisions they make towards their realisation.

Contrasting autonomy with heteronomy within SDT, Ryan and Deci (2006); cf. Ryan (1993) distinguished between autonomy and heteronomy characterizing the former as self-governance and independence and the latter as regulation from outside forces or pressures or 'external others'. I underline the influence of 'external others' and note that self-determined action must reflect 'wholehearted consent to external inputs or inducements'. Noting therefore that to be deemed 'autonomous', an act must be endorsed by the self, fully identified with and owned' (Ibid.), I endorse the use of the category 'autonomy-heteronomy mix' instead of 'autonomy' since a wholehearted consent and fully identifying and owning actions by external others is untenable in real operations, especially risky ones in hazardous environments. Also, the notion of the 'autonomous individual' is a valorisation of individualism, when no individual is fully autonomous as we are dependent (or interdependent) on others for most things. In real-life risky operations, the behaviours of employees cannot be said to be 'self-endorsed' and reflected given that most workers are trained to work in particular ways, following strict laid-down procedures. This suggests a 'controlled regulation' that occurs 'without self-endorsement'.

SDT (see concept map Fig. 4 below) focuses on needs and expectations but does not focus on exchange as OST discussed above does. SDT relates a SHRP as sources of meeting need-types that, when met, internally motivate employees. It proposes that a SHRP could be experienced by employees making them feel competent, autonomous, and related with, resulting in internal motivations that drive them to function optimally, be productive, and performing, when the

motivation is positive, helping in realising organisational goals. At least three mechanisms are suggested here, namely, what I refer to as 'perception of need met' mechanism (another form of Perceived support mechanisms), Affect, and Co-determined mechanisms. I raise a provisional conjecture based on this theory. A SHRP is related to OFP mediated by Perceived support mechanisms, Affect mechanisms, Co-determined mechanism, and moderated by Employee value system and Management Belief system. While SDT can be drawn upon to highlight how using HRP's to meet the most important needs and expectations of individual employees could internally motivate them leading to their optimal functioning, in isolation, it fails to adequately explain HRM-P.

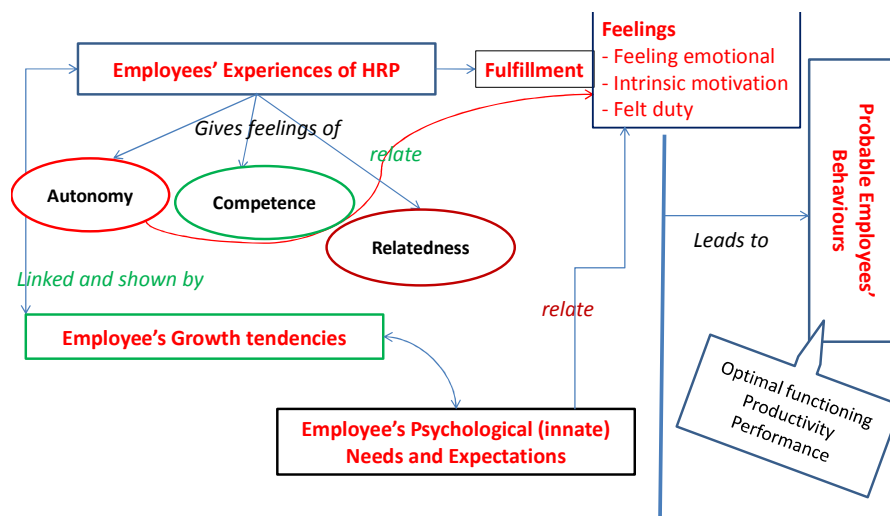


Fig. 4 Concept map for Self-Determination theory

### 2.6.3 Transaction cost Economic theory

Transaction cost economic theory (TCE) is predominantly concerned with 'economizing on transaction costs' (Williamson 2008 1981). Williamson argued that

governance structure or contract and its relationships trump 'resource allocation' in economic organizing and that "the ultimate unit of activity" from the lens of contract/governance is transaction (Ibid. ; cf. Buchanan 2001: p29; Commons 1931: p4). Williamson further argued that governance must be viewed as 'the means by which to infuse order, thereby to mitigate conflict and realize mutual gains' (Ibid.) leading to organisational efficiency.

TCE 'assumes that business enterprises choose governance structures that economise transaction costs associated with establishing, monitoring, evaluating, and enforcing agreed upon exchanges' (Jackson and Schuler 1995; cf. Williamson 1979; Williamson 1981). The theory thereby predicts the nature of the governance structure that enterprises will choose by incorporating two behavioral assumptions – the cognitive assumption of bounded rationality (instead of the classical Economics' assumption of hyperrationality) and opportunism defined as the 'seeking of self-interest with guile' (Ibid.). See concept map Fig. 5 below. As an extension of cognition, the theory also assumes that human actors have 'feasible foresight'. The meaning of these assumptions is that organisations are mainly concerned with 'how to design governance structures that take advantage of bounded rationality while safeguarding against opportunism' (Williamson 2008). Williamson observed that in transactional exchanges, humans behave usually in 'routine' ways and when they go out of such ways, such behaviours are seen as an 'exception' or 'outlier disturbances' (Ibid.). Further, he observed that managements in organizing are concerned with 'coordinated adaptation', i.e. managing those exceptions or opportunistic behaviours (Ibid.). Internally, in their organisations, implicit and explicit contracts are

established, monitored, enforced, and revised (Ibid.). What then are the implications of this theory for HRM?

TCE is concerned with how HRPs can be used to manage employee behaviours ranging from assumed self-interestedness (bounded rational employees and opportunistic behaviour) of employees to altruism. By combining a SHRPs with governance structures of their choice (e.g., selecting HRPs to suit implicit or explicit contracts), employer organisations can align employees' interest with organisation's interests thereby mitigating conflicts and infusing order (see Jackson and Schuler 1995; cf. Wright and McMahan 1992) in employer-employee internal relations. TCE can therefore be drawn upon to view the HRPs as part of transactions which governance structures (e.g. contracts) govern with the objective of reducing transaction costs that may arise from establishing and sustaining exchange transactions between employees and employers. Table 1 below further defines the terms or concepts used by TCE and how the HRM-P problem can be reformulated in 'comparative contractual terms'. At least two mechanisms are suggested by this theory, namely Exchange transaction mechanism, profit maximization mechanism, and Governance structure mechanism. I make a provisional conjecture based on TCE theory. A SHRP is related to OFP mediated by Exchange Transaction mechanism, Governance mechanism, Profit maximization mechanism, and moderated by corporate strategy as contextual mechanism.

While it is possible to use TCE to reformulate the HRM-P problem as a contracting problem so as to 'take advantage of the transaction cost economizing terms' (See Williamson 2010a), in isolation it cannot fully explain the HRM-P link.

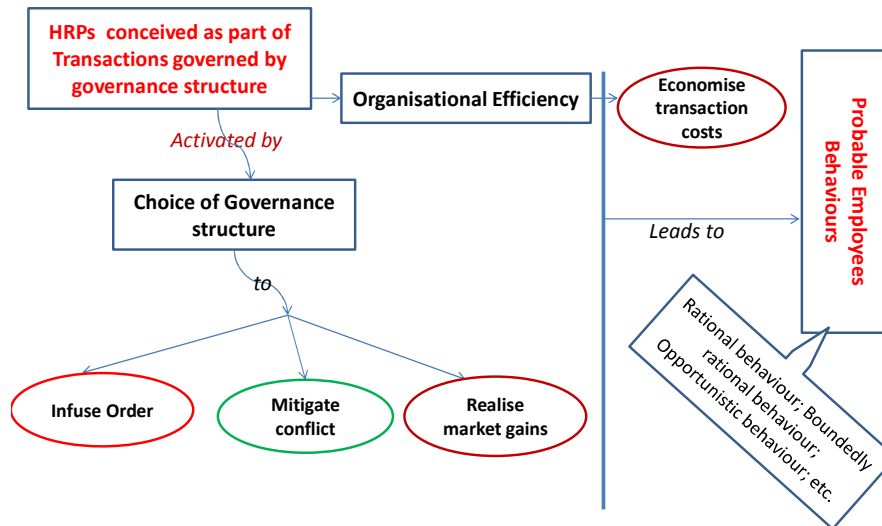


Fig. 5 Concept map for Transactional Cost Economic theory

#### 2.6.4 Resource based view

The resource-based theory of the firm (henceforth RBV), combines concepts from strategic management and organisational economics disciplines (Jackson and Schuler 1995: p243; cf. Conner 1991; Barney 1991). See concept map in Fig. 6 below. RBV emphasises 'the link between strategy and the internal resources of a firm' (Wright and McMahan 1992: p300). The assumptions held by the RBV are as follows: 1) Firms can be successful if they possess competitive advantage and sustainable competitive advantage (See Porter 1985). Competitive advantage is gained when firms implement 'a value-creating strategy', inimitable by competitors and non-substitutable (Barney 1991).

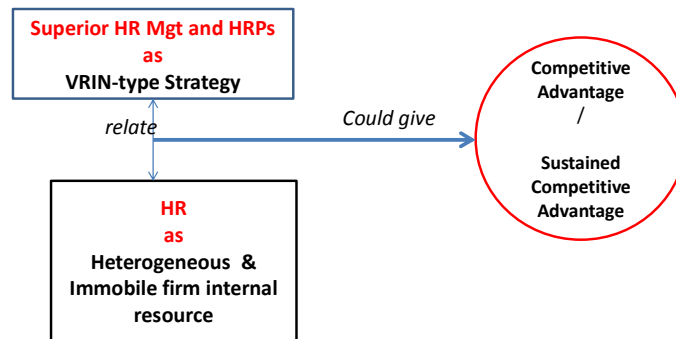
Transactional Cost Economics concepts	Definition (Most definitions taken from (Williamson 2008, 2010a, b))	How HRM-P epitomizes such concepts
Self-interest seeking	This describes the behaviour of human actors in transactional exchanges as seeking their own interest while attending to some given goals.	Stakeholders in HRM-P are self-interest seeking. Organisations exhibit this (even opportunistic behaviours) though termed nicely as 'strategic behaviour'.
Bounded rationality	This is an assumption of the way human actors would behave in transactions due to the limit of their cognitive capacities. This limits managers and contracts' ability to control incentives	Human actors in employee-employer-client relations are assumed to be boundedly rational. In exchange transactions, some other theories assume humans cooperate and reciprocate as well.
Opportunistic behaviour	The assumed behaviour of some actors in taking advantage of their partner. This behaviour which increases transaction costs, poses some problems in transactions and with such behaviour a human actor can capture the value of investments made by others. The opposite is trustworthiness (Dasborough and Sue-Chan 2002).	Stakeholders protect themselves from opportunistic behaviours of their partners. Organisations try to internalize their investments by enacting some implicit or explicit contracts. Note that if individuals put up this behaviour, it is termed 'opportunistic' but when organisations put up this behaviour it is termed 'strategic' behaviour.
Transaction cost	In running transactions or exchanges, institutions (markets, firms/hierarchies, franchises) generate transaction costs and production/operation costs. Neoclassical economics used to assume zero transaction costs but TCE holds the view of positive transaction costs. 'For transaction cost economizing purposes, the critical dimensions of transactions are complexity, the condition of asset specificity, and the disturbances to which a transaction is subject'.	There exist transactions and operations costs arising from negotiating, monitoring, evaluating and enforcing/implementing contracts in HRM-P (Jones-Wright 1992; Dasborough and Sue-Chan 2002).
Asset specific investments	Certain transactions require asset specificity to be efficient. Such assets are not easily redeployable.	Organisations invest in extended training and development while employees invest their best work efforts because they bring to their roles their best, non-transferable skills which organisations try to own as assets.
Feasible foresight	The real responsibility of management is to adapt the organization taking advantage of boundedly rational behaviours but protecting the organization against opportunistic behaviours employing cognition and foresight. This adaptation mitigates hazards such as outlier disturbances or exceptions which do not follow routines. It is the extension of the cognitive assumption in TCE.	Organisations can take advantage of foresight to design contracts and strategies to mitigate hazards or use contracts to protect against opportunistic behaviours of relating partners.

Transactional Cost Economics concepts	Definition (Most definitions taken from (Williamson 2008, 2010a, b))	How HRM-P epitomizes such concepts
Bilateral dependency	Parties are bilaterally dependent when they invest in transaction-specific assets.	Employees and Employers have made transaction-specific investments in their relationship and so can be viewed as bilaterally dependent. Other organisational theories like social exchange theory assume interdependence among parties.
Coordinated adaptation	These are cognitive moves (extended cognition is termed foresight as above) by parties to adapt when hazards like outlier disturbances occur. It is termed autonomous adaptation in market settings.	This is really what the HRM function is all about in organisations. In implementing the psychological contracts and service contracts which are necessarily incomplete, stakeholders must necessarily adapt to ever-present hazards due to the expected behaviours of some actors (outlier disturbances).
Contracts or governance structures	Contracts are designed to achieve efficient transactions reducing transaction costs as much as possible. Due to the complexity of most contracts, they are never complete because it can never capture all the contingencies that are possible. There is mutuality of advantage from voluntary exchanges involving contracting.	Employee-employer contracts, Service contracts or Organisation-Client contracts, and performance contracts are some of the contracts available.
Vertical Integration and Outsourcing	This is a governance structure where 'both parties mutually own assets, control and transaction can be modified by managerial fiat'. Outsourcing is a governance structure that can be used to produce goods and services where the transaction costs for internalizing production within hierarchies (as opposed to markets) does not indicate business efficiency. The other mode of governance is markets.	HRM function is organisation's efforts to control incentives for behaviours and actions of stakeholders and manage the transactions and contracts or modify them in an ongoing basis. Operating producing petroleum companies normally outsource certain operations (e.g. drilling operations) to oil service companies where they believe the oil service companies own the technologies and own expert personnel to handle such operations cost-effectively and where transaction and operation costs can be better reduced.

**Table 1:** Reformulating the HRM-P problem in 'comparative contractual terms'

2) Competitive advantage can only occur in a context of 'a firm resource heterogeneity' (resources differ across firms) and 'firm resource immobility' (meaning inability of competing firms to obtain resources from other firms, that is,

resources cannot be transferred from firm to firm) (Wright and McMahan 1992: p301). To possess sustainable competitive advantage the resource must meet the criteria of VRIN which stands for Valuable, Rare and unique, Imperfectly Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (Ibid.; Barney 1991).



VRIN stands for Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable

Fig. 6 Concept map for Resource based View theory

Human resources have been suggested to be sources of competitive advantage and a 'superior HR management' can become a 'means of gaining and maintaining competitive advantage' (Wright and McMahan 1992; Ulrich 1991; Schuler and Macmillan 1984) since HRM can be used to influence a firm's human and organizational resources (Schuler and Macmillan 1984; Wright and McMahan 1992). Ulrich according to Wright and McMahan (Ibid.: p301) discussed how HRPs can be 'used by firms to develop strategies that can lead to sustained Competitive advantage'. Wright and McMahan (Ibid.: p302-3) examined the conditions under which HR can be a source for sustained competitive advantage in the context of RBV

since it satisfies the VRIN criteria. HR can be Valuable under conditions of what the authors called 'heterogeneous demand for labour' (i.e. that firms have jobs requiring different skill types) and 'heterogeneous supply of labour' (i.e. individuals differ in their skills and skills' levels). HR can be rare when firms take stringent steps to hire high-ability individuals; Inimitable because HR is characterised by unique historical conditions, causal ambiguity, and social complexity arising from unique relationships; and Non-substitutable since most firms own highly competent employees who cannot be substituted easily even after technologies have been sold off. RBV thus provides a framework for 'viewing HR as a pool of skills', providing a resource for sustained competitive advantage; and a framework for examining which human resources can enable or thwart a planned strategy (Ibid.: p303).

The nature of HR assets which constitute an organisation's internal resource or workforce affects the nature of the organisation. When therefore an organisation is influenced in its decision-making by the external and internal pressures from its environment, including competitive forces, then it is logical that forces will be set in motion to influence the behaviours of its employees. RBV enables us to consider how combining HRPs with a Value-creating strategy mechanism influences employees to make available their VRIN-ranked skills and attributes – determinants of employee behaviours - giving the organisation competitive advantage over competitors and how organisations by sustaining HRPs give the organisation sustained competitive advantage over the competition. At least one mechanism is suggested by this theory - a VRIN-ranked Value creating strategy mechanism. I make

a provisional conjecture based on this theory. A SHRP is related to OFP mediated by VRIN-ranked Value-creating strategies and moderated by Institutional mechanism.

Considered in isolation, the RBV points out that HRPs and HRM can produce a sustained competitive advantage (See Way and Johnson 2005: p4) due to their attributes. Though lacking in explanation of how HRPs actually influence the behaviours of employees which the other theories try to explain, it is able to link the behaviours to OFP through the concept of sustained competitive advantage by giving the insight that an organization can use its HR assets to acquire competitive advantage which should make it more profitable in the long run.

#### **2.6.5 Institutional theory**

Institutional theory is viewed as an underexploited theory especially where complexity exists (Lee 2011: p70; cf. Björkman 2006). Just as individuals are assumed by role theory to 'respond to normative pressures as they seek approval for their performances in socially defined roles', similarly, institutional theory 'views organizations as social entities that seek approval for their performances in socially constructed environments' (Jackson and Schuler 1995). Institutional theory uses the concept of 'isomorphism' to describe organizations' conformance to gain 'legitimacy and acceptance' from many stakeholders who control the resources they may need for survival (Ibid.; cf. Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1977). See concept map Fig. 7 below.

Institutional pressures arise internally from 'formalized structures and processes, as well as informal or emergent group and organization processes' while

'forces in the external environment include those related to the state (e.g. laws and regulations), the professions (e.g. licensure and certification), and other organizations – especially those within the same industrial sector' (Ibid.; cf. Zucker 1987; Scott 1987). 'Regardless of the source of institutional pressures, two central assertions of this perspective are (a) institutionalized activities are resistant to change and (b) organizations in institutionalized environments are pressured to become similar' (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Thus, in this theoretical perspective, context is the major explanation for both resistance to change and the adoption of new HRM approaches. In HRM context, the first assertion suggests that HRM activities have deep historical roots in the organization, so they cannot be understood completely without analyzing the organization's past. From the second assertion it follows that HRM activities may be adopted by an organization simply because other organizations have done so.

Nielsen (2001) lists six Institutional approaches that share at least four theoretical assumptions and have three methodological commonalities as CR meta-theory cited by Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006). American neo-Institutionalism; evolutionary economics; new economic sociology; historical Institutionalism; and the cognitive-institutional approach (except new Institutionalism in political science which is committed to positivism) are compatible with CR. The key theoretical assumptions these approaches share with CR are:

'First, they focus on the role of institutions (and social structures) such as habits, routines, and norms in the coordination of behaviour. Second, human agency is seen as purposeful, or intendedly rational, endowed with some freedom to deliberate or

choose in accordance with individual psychology rather than, on one hand, as irrational, automatic rule-followers or totally encapsulated in an externally defined role or, on the other hand, rational in the sense of isolated maximizing 'economic man'. Third, they emphasize the constitutive importance of the cultural and cognitive framework. Finally, they recognize the central and pervasive role of power and conflict' (Ibid.; cf. Nielsen 2001).

Lee (2011) showed how Institutional theory could inform HRM through Isomorphism's three mechanisms – coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, and normative isomorphism. Institutional Isomorphism is a constraining process that influences one unit within a population to resemble other units in the same population facing similar environmental conditions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: p149). In summary, Institutional theory highlights that Institutional, political, and other external pressures enable and constrain organisational choices in selecting HRPs which when enacted within the organization, exert isomorphic internal pressures upon employees' decision making to act (their behaviours) which tend towards some form of 'institutionalized behaviours' in consonance with organisational strategy. The cognition enables employees to think that everyone has to operate at the same level. Every employee knows they have to socialize to the same level or routines or behaviours. Employer organisations have to think survivalist; i.e. they have to make HRP choices that legitimize them so they are accepted in society as responsible organisations. At least one mechanism is suggested by this theory - an Institutional or particularly an Isomorphic mechanism. I make a provisional conjecture based on this theory. A SHRP is related to OFP

mediated by Isomorphic (coercive, mimetic and normative) mechanism and moderated by other external pressures and political forces (institutional mechanism), with corporate strategy as contextual mechanism).

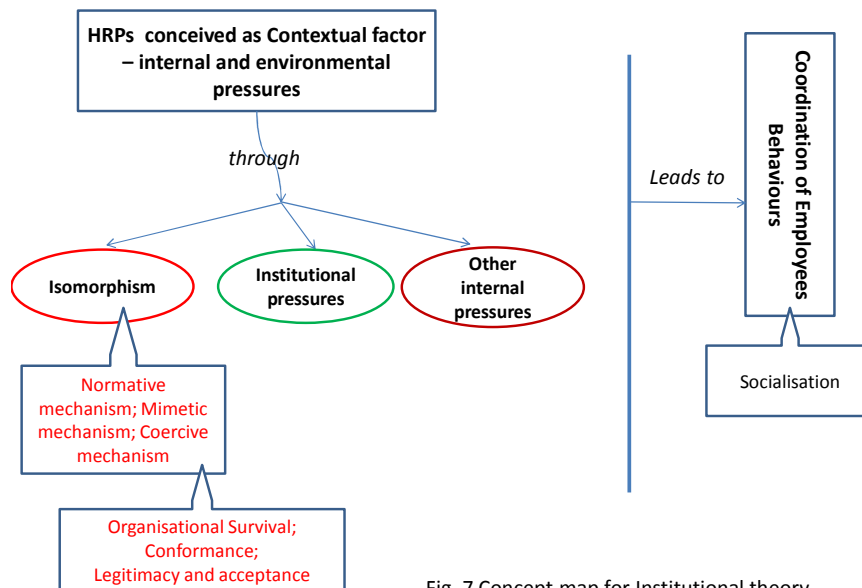


Fig. 7 Concept map for Institutional theory

I emphasize that in general, from a CR lens, each of these theories can be seen as different ways of stating: Each time a HRP or a SHRP combines with a mechanism, a social structure is formed which the agents (human actors) draw upon reproducing the structures (morphostasis), transforming (morphogenesis) and being transformed thereby (double-morphogenesis).

Back to our missing theory question: exactly which theory can we then borrow, and usefully use in the analysis of the HRM-P 'link'? It is difficult to find one theory that takes care of all the issues touching the HRM-P phenomenon. In isolation, none of the theories reviewed covers all the aspects of the HRM-P to be able to fully explain the phenomenon and help answer the research questions.

Preparatory to considering the possibilities of integrating them, I consider next how the theories reviewed above relate.

#### **2.6.6 How the Theories described above Relate**

While SDT relates employee-need types e.g. growth tendencies and other innate psychological needs to intrinsic motivation, the driver of the autonomous decisions employees make, OST relates employee-need types e.g. needs for one's well-being and the need for one's contributions to be recognized and valued to extrinsic motivation. OST gives the insight that consequences of a source of motivation or emotion (e.g. a SHRP) in exchange transactions are perception and motivation. Oliver (2011); cf. Sayer (1992) noted that rules and reason mediate structures and individual action. Perception (as with comprehension) and motivation are synonyms for reason. While OST and SDT focus on the perceptions, emotions, experiences, and behaviours of employees in exchange transactions, TCE focuses on the behaviours of organisations, who through their choice and design of governance structures, respond to certain behaviours of employees in exchange transactions. TCE thus focuses well on both the environmental and economic factors. While it details the economic and financial aspects of exchange transactions, TCE is not explicit on the constitution of each exchange transaction as it relates to what employees bring to the exchange. In other words, while the financial components of exchange transactions are well provided by TCE, what drives behaviour or agency is not made explicit. On this point, as already mentioned above, OST provides needed insight by focusing on the human factors - perception, reciprocity, and feelings - giving less attention to the so-called environmental factors. Perception leads to

responses such as reciprocation, reinforcement of action, and decision making. Though slim on financial aspects (except for Blau on economic utilitarianism), OST and SDT provide better insight into non-financial (or socio and psychological) investments like emotion, motivation, loyalty, affective commitment, discretionary work efforts, etc. TCE applied to SHRM is concerned with how HRP can be used to achieve a governance structure for managing contracts taking employee behaviours into account (Wright and McMahan 1992; Jackson and Schuler 1995). In other words, HRP can be used to control or manage employees' behaviours by exploring transactions. RBV highlights how organisations can properly manage their internal resources. Upon conforming to institutional pressures to gain approval, legitimacy, and survival, organisations decide on their HR policies, HRPs, and other organisational processes by which they take advantage of employees' skills, traits, values, and attributes. It is expected that enacting these HRPs produce internal isomorphic pressures on employees to conform to certain behaviours with the aim of realizing organisational objectives. Well managed, organisations are able to turn both institutional and competitive pressures into competitive and sustained competitive advantage over the competitors. Institutional theory, like RBV, therefore focuses on the environmental forces (internal and external) that organisations are subjected to.

With the exception of Institutional theory, all the other four theories reviewed above are based on false assumptions of neoclassical Economics that human agents are rational economic man (REM)(Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008c: p128-40). The REM assumption is not in keeping with CR meta-theory. Aside the

faulty metatheoretical foundations four of these theories have in the context of the phenomenon (i.e. they are not committed to a CR meta-theory) being investigated, I contend that all five reviewed theories, in isolation, have strong implications for HRM-P research given that each contributes to explaining an aspect of the phenomenon but none gives a full explanation to qualify as 'the missing theory'. How then can we rectify the fault so that an integration of these theories can be attempted?

## **2.7. An Integrated Theoretical Framework**

In their 2006b article, Fleetwood and Hesketh, while reviewing likely sources of theory for HRM-P research, advocated that 'an adhoc combination of several accounts or theories bolted together in some way' can be used to construct a framework (Ibid.: p136). They, caution that 'bolting' together theories that have differing metatheories cannot produce a coherent framework (Ibid.). I attempt in this sub-section, an integration of the theories reviewed above. My initial objective therefore is to show under what conditions I can bolt together or combine theories with differing meta-theories and assumptions.

### **2.7.1 Criteria for bolting together or combining theories**

Fleetwood and Hesketh (2008: p136) contend that in bolting together theories committed to different metatheories, we lose sophisticated insights the reference theory might lend. Where the theories reviewed are not at the same levels of abstraction, the resulting integrated framework could have weak fault lines (Ibid.).

Integrating a theoretical framework is a process which involves two modes:

a) the combination of elements of different theories or approaches, i.e. including some and excluding elements deemed inconsequential (see Marion Festing 2006 in Stahl and Bjorkman 2006, p449); and b) the relaxation of certain assumptions including 'knowingly false assumptions' (see Fleetwood and Hesketh 20008). For example the REM assumption held by neoclassical economic-based theories (i.e. economic rationality or utility maximization assumption in human behaviour) can be relaxed for what I refer to as a 'Strategic economic man' assumption (intendedly rational or planned rationality) or even the non-rationality or 'normative rationality' assumption in decision making (see Paauwe and Boselie 2003). Let me unpack the two modes a bit.

a) Combination of elements of different theories

The starting point is that the researcher should take steps to ensure the combining theories are founded on a common meta-theory and where not so, on a more appropriate meta-theory which better describes the phenomena and the investigated world. One way of 'bolting together' theories to construct an integrated framework is to take what is valuable in each theory i.e. what has strong implications for HRM-P research. Another way of doing this is to start from one theory (reference theory) and fill the gaps perceived by drawing insight from other theories. Festing (2006: p455) cite Harvey, Speier and Novicevic (2001) to have *combined* agency theory with expectancy theory when 'explaining staffing policies in MNEs'. Evidence in prior literature suggests that RBV and Institutional perspectives can co-exist (Oliver 1997). Lee (2011) suggests that Institutional theory could add further insight

when used with RBV. Paauwe and Boselie (2003) citing other scholars as below note that a strong link exists between new Institutionalism and resource-dependency theory (cf. Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Oliver 1991; Zucker in DiMaggio and Powell 1991) and population ecology theory (cf. Trist 1977; Hannan and Freeman 1977: p59-60). From the foregoing, I consider Institutional theory which is rooted in a CR meta-theory a reference theory to which the other theories can be bolted. The need to combine Institutional theory (seeing it as reference theory) with other theoretical perspectives had been highlighted by other HRM researchers, especially by researchers in International HRM who aim to go beyond individual theoretical perspectives to build 'integrative models' (see Bjorkman 2006). Taylor *et al.* (1996) and Way and Johnson (2005) developed HRM integrated frameworks that among other things drew concepts from literature.

Importantly, I consider the underlying bases of the combining theories to see how they may complement each other. Just a few examples because of space constraints: TCE gives insight about governance structures being used by organisations to manage contracts, which behaviour ultimately influences employees' behaviours. Institutional theory gives insight about environmental pressures (e.g. government policies, regulators, Unions) influencing organisations to conform for legitimacy and survival. These insights point to notions of structure and agency interacting. The expected outcome is that 'bolting together' the four theories with Institutional theory as reference could produce a coherent integrated framework to underpin empirical research on the HRM-P link. Regardless whether

each of these theories focuses on influencing one agent/entity, either the organization or the employee, the integrated framework focuses on both.

### **2.7.2 The Integrated HRM-P Theoretical Framework – a two-part framework**

The integrated theoretical framework can be understood as a two-part framework in order to explain the contribution of theory components. With Institutional theory as reference theory, the micro or behaviour part is an integration of theory components, drawing on the conception that HRPs can be used for the coordination of employee behaviours leading to improved employee and organisational outcomes. The theory components for this part are drawn from modified versions of four theories, namely OST, SDT, TCE, and Institutional theory. I say more about these component-theories later below in this sub-section. Organisations which themselves are under external institutional and internal (isomorphic) pressure, enact HRPs or a SHRP embedded in governance structures (e.g. employee contracts). Employees have perceptions and form beliefs about these HRPs relative to their interests and wellbeing. Following that, their experiences of the HRPs draw out feelings and emotions from them. Motivated or de-motivated, the employees may change their behaviours in favour of or against the organisation's goals or interests. The change in behaviour may or may not improve OFP. Next, I combine the micro part with a macro part represented by the RBV framework. The RBV explores the relationship between an organisation's strategy and its internal resources; draws out the insight that a VRIN-type strategy (represented by the choice of HRM and HRPs) and a heterogeneous and mostly immobile firm resource (represented by a firm's HR) could give it competitive

advantage (CA) or sustained competitive advantage (SCA) where the pools of skills and advantage-giving heterogeneous behaviours are drawn from the employees as the micro part already shows. In the macro part, contextual mechanisms (e.g. corporate strategy) in interaction with HRPs interpenetrate and combine in moderation of other mechanisms, coordinating employees' behaviours. The macro part explains the link between coordinated behaviours and OFP (e.g. the generation of profit) through the creation of CA/SCA. By the combination of the two parts, an Integrated HRM-P Theoretical Framework is developed which I unpack and put together again in the next paragraph.

The integrated theoretical framework proposed here suggests that in an organisational setting, given a SHRP, employees perceive the SHRP as either organisational support, or enablers of competence, autonomy relatedness, and fulfillment, or as part of a contract/governance structure aimed at coordinating/regulating/controlling behaviour; creating in them intrinsic or extrinsic motivations, conforming/mimetic feelings; resulting in employees' either reciprocating behaviours, optimal functioning, cost-reducing behaviours during transactions, various unpredictable behaviors, and institutionalized behaviours contingent on the negativity, positivity, or level of the perception and on a host of other factors; all these ultimately having the possibility to influence the OFP. The ultimate firm production is the production of performance (i.e. OFP is the product). An organization has to decide whether the performance is done internally or externally in the market; in HRM, whether the performance is produced within the boundaries of the firm or outside it touching the client. Generally, the theories as

well as the integrated framework show that a SHRP combining with causal mechanisms forming structures which human agents (employees, managers, and clients' agents) draw upon, can influence their behaviours generating various HR and organisational outcomes. Table 2 below explicates the components and frames of the integrated framework highlighting that the SHRP, the employees' cognition (perceptions and beliefs) and the human actors' feelings constitute what I refer to as a HRM system which represents the social superstructure drawn upon by human agents. The concepts of the integrated framework are discussed further below. I highlight that the integrated framework here developed has different assumptions from those held by OST, TCE, RBV, and TCE.

#### b) Relaxing some Assumptions

I propose that a set of theories wherein the so-called 'knowingly false assumptions' are relaxed is grouped as a collection of neo-TCE, neo-OST, neo-Institutionalist theory, neo-Affect theory, etc. where each stands for further-developed versions of these existing theories with certain assumptions relaxed. Take TCE for example which is seen as rooted in neoclassical economic theory, TCE had started to relax the assumptions of neoclassical economic theory (NET) by suggesting that certain productions are best performed within firms, outside markets which is seen as an aberration by NET.

With such relaxations, tensions between theories can be relieved. Prior literature suggests that RBV and Institutional perspectives can co-exist (see Oliver 1997: p61). While the RBV focuses on explanations for firm heterogeneity in order to be able to account for differences in performance, Institutional theory which aims at

explaining isomorphism (firm homogeneity) can become helpful in explaining why HRPs are what they are and why the employees who experience them increasingly can become *more alike*. While the RBV builds on the 'economic rationality' assumption of human behaviour (utility maximisation), the Institutional theory emphasises the 'normative rationality' (or non-rationality) behind decision-making processes.

I elected, for ease of identification, to call the group of modified theories and Institutional theory (i.e. neo-TCE, neo-OST, neo-RBV, neo-self determined and Institutional theory) 'Institutional approaches' indicating their commitment to [or at worst tendency towards] CR meta-theory. Here is why: The new Institutional Economics approaches (comprising TCE, Agency theory, and Property rights theory) which make a great deal of rules under 'economic institutions' (Festing, M. 2006) are different from Institutional theory which makes a great deal of 'social' institutions. The 'new Institutionalists' are not the scholars involved in the new Institutional economics but used to differentiate 'old institutionalists' (e.g. Durkheim, Weber, and others) from 'new institutionalists' or neo-Institutionalists (e.g. Scott, DiMaggio and Powel, Tolbert and Zucker, and others). This thesis could then be said to be drawing upon the new Institutional Economics approaches (TCE, Agency theory, Property rights theory) and the new Institutional theory and the RBV (one could yet argue that the RBV is part of the new Institutional economic approaches) and the Employee-behavioural perspectives (including Behavioural theory, OST (OST encompasses SET and Affect theory). Nielsen talks of 'the new institutionalisms' and the development of relationships amongst them and of 'future cooperation among different

institutionalisms'. Alternatively, one could decide to group them all and call them another name - 'new economic sociology' (see Nielsen 2001).

Theory	Socio-structural components	Agents qua Employees Cognition - Perceptions/Beliefs about HRP	Employee Feelings	Agency: Employee Behaviour	Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms	Possible Terminal Outcome
Organisational Support Theory (OST)	<b>System of HRP</b> <b>enacted</b>	Organisational support and sign of commitment, fairness, equity from employer	Affective (extrinsic motivation); felt obligation; belonging/related; trusting	Reciprocal behaviour; can increase effort; 'Moral agency' or 'Socio-cognitive Agency'	Perceived support, Affect, Employee value, Management beliefs	<b>OFP</b>
Self-determined Theory (SDT)	„	Personality growth and development	Affective (Intrinsic motivation); felt fulfilment	Optimal, competent, efficient functioning; 'Autonomous Intelligent Agency'	Co - Determined, Affect	„
Transactional cost Economic Theory (TCE)	„	As part of a mutually advantageous transaction governed by governance structures	Satisfied and self-fulfilled	Opportunistic or boundedly rational; Cost-conscious behaviour in transactional exchange; 'Economic agency'	Exchange Transaction, Governance, Cost-reducing or profit maximization, Corporate strategy	„
Resource Based View (RBV)	„	Personality growth and value	Attained self-interest	Unpredictable heterogeneous behaviours (causal ambiguity)	VRIN-ranked value creating strategy	„
Institutional Theory	„	Enculturation factor; Indicative of power imbalance	Feeling conforming to belong, relatedness	Institutionalized behaviours; habituation; Socialized Agency	Isomorphic, Institutional pressures, political, corporate strategy, other factors	„

Table 2: Integrated HRM-P theoretical framework

### 2.7.3 Concepts emerging from the integrated framework

Having developed the integrated framework, I discuss next the concepts emerging from the integrated framework. The discussion helps explain and is helped by the Table 2 above.

#### 1) Employees' Cognitive framework: Perceptions of HRP and their Beliefs

These perceptions vary. Employees could perceive the provision of HRPs as organisational support (see OST). TD and RB could be perceived by employees as personality growth factors (see SDT). In TCE, HRPs can be perceived by employees as part of contracts governing their relationship with the employer and as a medium of exchange mutually advantageous to both parties. Since RBV suggests that HR is a strategic asset, employees may perceive HRPs as growth and value creator stressing their importance to the organization. Based on the Institutional theory, employees may perceive HRPs as enablers/constraints and regulators for required behaviours.

### *Beliefs*

Beliefs of human actors which are usually collected from data as expressed by respondents in interviews or questionnaires or from very many other sources should not be taken as hard facts. While they are important, and at times the types may be combined in one case data, not all may be useful for data analysis, and some may not be taken at face value as transcribed. For example, some data may not be answering the 'why' question and so may be ill-conditioned for coding. Analysts should use such data with caution and so need to evaluate them before using them.

### II) Feelings generated in employees

OST suggests that employees perceiving and experiencing HRPs feel emotional (affect) resulting in extrinsic motivation. Some researchers suggest that employees have 'felt obligations' towards supportive employer organisations. SDT suggests that HRPs can also create intrinsic motivation in employees (due to feelings of competence, relatedness, autonomy, fulfilment and satisfaction). TCE and RBV would suggest that employees will feel satisfied, self-fulfilled with utility or profit-

maximized and self-interest-attained. Institutional theory would suggest that employees will feel conforming to the organisational culture and interests leaving them with a sense of oneness (relatedness), socializing, and habituating. I suggested above that the SHRPs, the employees' cognitive framework and the feeling of all human actors combined can be viewed as a HRM system which represents the complex social superstructure human agents draw upon.

### III) Agency (Behaviours)

Various researchers have examined how organisations try to control or manage employee behaviour (Thompson 1967; Mowday 1998; Wright and Snell 1991). Wright and Snell in their model on generating HRM strategies in HRM systems proposed as 'input' to the system the competences of individuals (knowledge, skills and abilities) while the 'throughput' is the behaviour and the 'output' is the performance (Ibid.). They argued that HR management's chief responsibilities are two fold – management of competences and behaviour management. Concerning linkages to such HRM systems, Way and Johnson (2005: p6) stated thus:

"It has been posited that to create value, produce sustainable competitive advantage, and enhance organizational effectiveness, the deployed HRM system (comprised of the HRM practices deployed by the organization) must be linked with other organizational resources (Delery 1998; Delery and Doty 1996b; Huselid *et al.* 1997). However, the exact conceptualization of such a linkage varies among researchers (Becker and Gerhart 1996; Chadwick and Cappelli 1999)".

The integrated framework conceptualises a linkage between a SHRP, governance structures, and behaviour. Employees may, upon experiencing HRPs and other constituents of the social structure, be constrained to reciprocal behaviour; moral

agency, i.e. obligation to act due to favour or support received (see OST); status agency, i.e. agency due to who one is or has become (his/her personal capacity); optimal functioning (see SDT); self-interested/opportunistic behaviour, boundedly rational, and cost-conscious behaviours (as in TCE); unpredictable heterogeneous behaviours (causal ambiguity) which can be ploughed to competitive advantage (as in RBV); and institutionalized compliant conforming behaviour (as in Institutional theory). So linking perceptual system to behaviour, apart from *perceived organisational support* (POS) as likely influencing reciprocal behaviour, we can have personal *growth/development belief* as likely influencing optimal functioning behaviour (from SDT); *perceived contract advantage* likely influencing cost-conscious behaviour (from TCE); *perceived belongingness* likely influencing compliant behaviour (from Institutional theory). Human agents draw upon social structures. The drawing upon social structures transforms them thereby influencing their agency (behaviour).

#### IV) Mechanisms

Twelve mediating, moderating, and contextual mechanisms were conjectured emerging from the theory components of the integrated theoretical framework. The nine mediating mechanisms are Perceived support system, Affect, Co-determined, Employee value system, Management belief system, Exchange Transaction, Governance structure, VRIN-ranked Value-creating strategies, profit-maximization, corporate strategy, Institutional, Isomorphic mechanisms). Corporate strategy and Institutional mechanisms (including political pressures, government policies and regulations of industry regulators) are deemed contextual mechanisms while

Employee value system and Management belief system are deemed moderating mechanisms. Empirical research will employ data to test the theories and tell us which of these conjectured mechanisms are actually in operation in HRM-P.

#### V) Outcomes

The employee or HR outcomes and the organisational outcomes are generated by the totality of the mediating, moderating, and contextual mechanisms operating in the HRM-P system. Employee outcomes may include, but are not limited to discretionary effort, employee turnover, and loyalty. More proximal organisational outcomes include, but are not limited to, productivity. Distal organisational outcomes include but are not limited to, OFP. See Fig. 8 below depicting the concepts of the integrated framework and where the component theories fit. The figure shows what employees perceive HRPs enacted by organisations as, their experiences, leading to the emotions (affect) evoked which motivate employees and of course managers and client agents at certain stages. It as well shows how organisations use HRPs and other structures to coordinate and adapt heterogeneous behaviours of employees while perceiving and experiencing the responses of employees and their clients.

#### **2.7.4 The Integrated framework's commitment to a CR meta-theory**

I show below how the integrated framework is committed to a CR meta-theory. Nielsen (2001, p512-13) summarized with four points the theoretical assumptions common to those theories committed to CR meta-theory as:

“ - Human agency is seen as purposeful, or intended rational, endowed with some freedom to deliberate or choose in accordance with individual psychology rather than, on one hand, as irrational, automatic rule-followers or totally encapsulated in an externally defined role or, on the other hand, rational in the sense of isolated maximizing "economic man."

- They emphasize the constitutive importance of the cultural and cognitive framework.

- They recognize the central and pervasive role of power and conflict.

- They focus on the role of institutions such as habits, routines, and norms in the coordination of behaviour. “

I add the following more points based on the insights gleaned from the integrated framework developed here:

- 1) They build on two pillars of the role of men – human agents - as perceivers and as causal agents.

- 2) Objects of investigation or of knowledge are conceived as intransitive (that is, the object exists independently of any human activity) and structured in character (underscores the distinctiveness of the sequence of events from the causal laws identified through it) (see Bhaskar 1978, p33-35).

At time T1, different employees in an organization may perceive the same HRP as different things to each of them. At another time T2, one of the employees, may perceive the same HRP as another thing. This underscores the nature of scientific change.

- 3) They emphasize the correspondence between perception, experience, causal agency and generative mechanisms (causal laws) (see Ibid.). Perception is the vehicle

for experience. Upon perceiving and experiencing the HRPs, employees as causal agents would act (behave) to trigger corresponding mechanisms which the experience and agency enable us to identify (Ibid., p34). The intelligibility of sense-perception presupposes the intransitivity of the object perceived, in this case, the HRP. It is in the independent occurrence or existence of such object that the

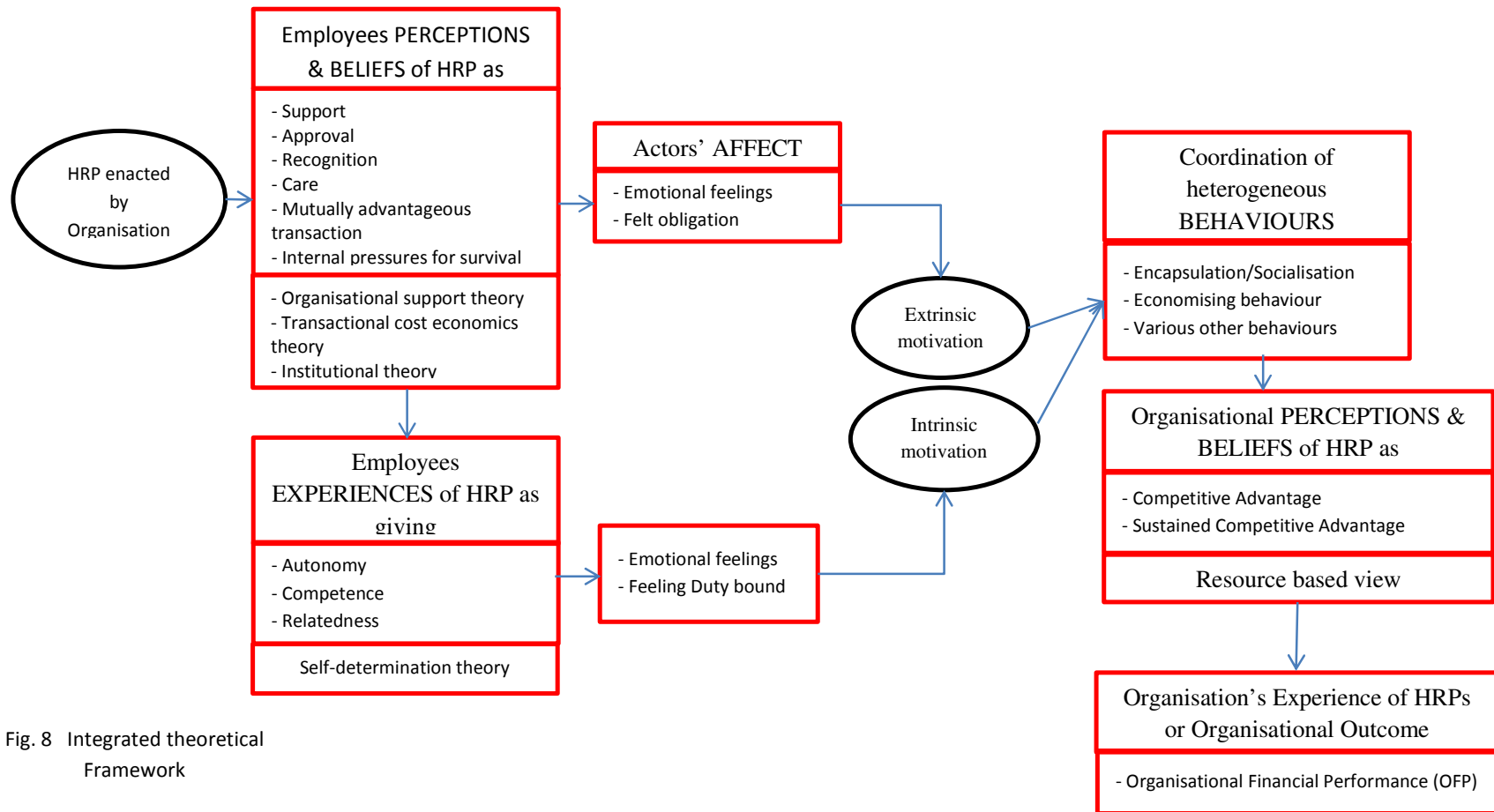


Fig. 8 Integrated theoretical Framework

meaning of perception and the epistemic significance of perception lies. It is possible for objects like HRPs not to be perceived by employees for so many reasons including the inadequacy of our human capacities even when enacted in the organisation. So, the employee and the researcher may or may not obtain theoretical knowledge of the HRPs.

4) I re-emphasize that they do not hold the assumption of a rational economic man or utility maximization as the rationale for human decision making.

5) The constitutive objects and components in the system can be aggregated into groups forming structure and agency which can be analysed in a Morphogenetic way. The integrated framework does not treat either structure or agency but takes both on board.

Based on the above points, the integrated theoretical framework whose statement is repeated below is founded on a CR meta-theory. It should be scrutinized by other researchers to prove its adequacy and coherency.

I construct the **statement of the integrated theoretical framework** as follows: HRP or a SHRP, administered through exchange transactions created by internally relating employee-employers, governed by an employee contract, is proposed to be useful to control or manage employees' and other organisational stakeholders' behaviours. These affected behaviours can be adapted in coordination by multiple stakeholders with set goals in mind, depending on the human actors' degree of defection from the organisational goal, leading to OFP and other emergent outcomes. The determinants of the management's decision to use the HRP are suggested to be factors such as corporate strategy, and the institutional and political

forces in the organisational internal and external environment. The integrated assumption for this framework is that humans behave not just boundedly rational and opportunistic but also cooperatively and reciprocally in exchange transactions. The assumption of a rational economic man (REM) held by Neoclassical Economics has been relaxed. Human actors are not just boundedly rational and opportunistic but can be cooperative and reciprocal and competitive. This assumption covers a wider spectrum of the real transactional nature of human actors than the assumption of a REM.

#### **2.7.5 Propositions based on the integrated framework**

Following Bjorkman (2003) and Paauwe and Boselie (2003), I develop next 8 testable propositions based on the integrated theoretical framework. These propositions are useful for empirical research where data is used to test the theoretical framework.

- 1) Employee Perceptions and belief of enacted HRP as organisational support may extrinsically motivate them towards cost-reducing and productive behaviours.
- 2) Employee Perceptions and belief of enacted HRP as fulfilling through giving feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness could produce in them emotional feelings and feeling duty-bound. This may intrinsically motivate them towards cost-reducing and productive behaviours.
- 3) Employee Perceptions and belief of enacted HRP as mutually advantageous transactions governed by contracts may motivate them towards cost-reducing behaviours.

- 4) Internal and external pressures force conformance leading to organisational citizenship and employee survival.
- 5) The motivations of the employees lead them to different heterogeneous behaviours including reciprocal, competitive, and economizing behaviours, socializing in the organization, being more productive, wanting to leave (absenteeism), etc. Their behaviours may be contagious influencing other employees or even agents of the organization and clients.
- 6) The employer agent's perception and belief may be that enacting HRP is a strategy for gaining CA and even SCA drawn from the benefits of employees' heterogeneous behaviours and other specific behaviours aligned to organisational strategy.
- 7) The employer agent's experience could be that HRP stimulated a change in OFP.
- 8) The employer agents – managers – may or may not be motivated to repeat the enactment of HRP or improve upon it based on the managers' perceptions and experiences and the advantage gained from the first enactment e.g. cost-reducing employee's behaviours, increased client patronage, etc.

No matter the outcome of this research (thesis), it has been established that further work is needed on how researchers might 'bolt together' theories rooted in different meta-theories or on how to combine them to develop a coherent theoretical framework.

## **2.8. Summary**

Post-2005 reviewers are of the view that the HRM-P debate is stagnating or ‘travelling in circles’ (Delery and Roumpi 2017) or at crossroads (Harris 2009b). Literature shows that empirical research on the HRM-P link had struggled to provide valid evidence for the hypothesized relationships between HRM and OFP suggesting that poor theory development (Fleetwood and Hesketh 2008b; Guest 1997) and an inappropriate methodology (leading to weak research designs) are at the root of the problems that led to the verdict. I argue that there are two reasons for this. First, the research have weak theoretical roots. Second, most of these research are committed to an inappropriate meta-theory, rooted in a vague kind of quasi-positivist/empiricist philosophy of science – a perspective that uses quantitative research techniques that presuppose the social world is a closed system (i.e. constituted by regularities in the flux of events) when, as CRs have argued, the social world is an open system (i.e. constituted by no universally constant event regularities). This thesis, argues for an entirely different philosophical approach – the CR approach - which does not presuppose closed systems. This position led to my searching for ‘the missing theory’ underpinning the HRM-P link research and to selecting what I consider an appropriate meta-theory for the HRM-P research – a CR meta-theory. The meta-theory informs and bequeaths an appropriate methodology, which in turn should inform the empirical research so that the HRM-P phenomenon could be better explained with more convincing evidence. A corollary to my argument is that a mechanistic view of HRM-P systems based on CR be considered as an alternative approach to studying HRM-P.

In an attempt to contribute an adequate theoretical framework that informs empirical research of the HRM-P link, I reviewed five theories to find which of them could be the missing theory for HRM-P empirical research. Each theory reviewed suggests mechanism(s) at its core. At least 12 mechanisms (8 mediating, 2 moderating and 2 contextual) were conjectured. Empirical research in subsequent chapters should test these theories and tell us which of these (if any) is operating and how. Because none of the theories could adequately and fully explain the HRM-P link, I discussed the criteria for combining or integrating these theories especially when they are rooted in different meta-theories. I tried to integrate the five theories reviewed including useful elements and relaxing the REM assumptions four of them have. The resulting integrated theoretical framework suggests that structures and agency are constituents of the complex organisational process in HRM-P highlighting that a SHRP could combine with causal mechanisms (forming complex social superstructure) drawn upon by human agents, influencing their agency (behaviours) and generating HR and organisational outcomes.

From the literature review, I potentially hope to make contribution to knowledge by the insight that a SHRP or HRP tends to cause OFP mediated by a host of combining and interpenetrating key mechanisms. This contribution, with further interrogation by other researchers, and with a CR meta-theory-informed-empirical research espoused, may possibly resolve the debate on the existence or not of a link between HRPs and OFP. The integrated theoretical framework here constructed is another potential contribution useful for underpinning HRM-P empirical research. There is still the need for more research developing theoretical frameworks and

conceptual models for HRM-P research if the problem of under-theorization in the discipline is to be systematically addressed.

Based on this literature review, the research questions posed are: Does a causal link exist between HRPs or a SHRP and OFP? If indeed such a causal link exists, what is its nature, that is, what are the mechanisms through which HRPs influence OFP and other outcomes? I restate the research questions in a theoretical context (based on the integrated theoretical framework) as follows:

A) Does a SHRP combining with governance structures and other mediating mechanisms causally influence productivity (PR), employee turnover (TO), and OFP through instigating employees' productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours and other stakeholders' behaviours?, and

B) If it does, what mechanisms, and other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP?

To answer these research questions, there is the need to, informed or guided by the integrated framework and the CR meta-theory, discuss the rationale behind the techniques and tools chosen for the collection of empirical data and for the analysis of collected data. These I consider in the next chapter - the methodology chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

'If we assume – as Critical Realism does – that social science studies are conducted in open systems, that reality consists of different strata with emergent powers, that it has ontological depth, and that facts are theory-laden, then these are some factors that affect the choice of design and method' (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p150).

#### 3.1 Introduction

Methodology has been defined as the overall approach to solving a problem using a research process (Remenyi *et al.* 2003; Collis 2009) or as the 'strategy, plan of action, process or design' underlying the choice and use of particular research methods linked to the research objectives or as the 'principles' which inform the chosen research methods based on the researcher's epistemological assumptions (Redman-MacLaren and Mills 2015). The specification therefore involves describing and justifying the use of particular research methods (Wellington 2000) based on the researcher's philosophical assumptions, while stating the consequences/implications for their use, enabling the reader to critically evaluate the research's overall credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln 1981; Krefting 1991; Creswell 1998; Christie *et al.* 2000).

In chapter 2, I discussed parts of the research process, namely the research problem, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and conjectures. These inform the rest of the research process and design (Maxwell 2012: p72). The SHRM literature was thematically and theoretically reviewed within the context of the research problem and the research questions. Answering the questions requires the specification of the rationale for making choices as to the

methods for data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The specification is done following a method. Other parts of the process are the research approach, the research strategy, and ending with the research techniques (Wedawatta and Ingirige 2012). Within the research design, further decisions are made as to 'how' the phenomenon is to be investigated and the time frame used, i.e. the 'when' of the method.

Divided into seven sections, this chapter is organised as follows: In section 3.2, I review the components of a research method. I describe and justify the decisions concerning the elements of the research design, especially the rationale for the strategy (case study) adopted for the research. In section 3.3, I detail the methods and techniques for data collection, justifying my choices. I highlight the pilot surveys and main case data collection techniques, and discuss the subtleties in data collection encountered. In section 3.4, I describe the rationale for the techniques selected for data analysis preparatory for extensive description and operationalisation of frameworks selected for CR-informed data analysis. In the sections 3.3 and 3.4, I make a case for explicit methods for Critical Realist informed data collection and analysis. In section 3.5, I consider the techniques for evaluating the research. While I discuss the ethical issues considered in section 3.5, I outline the limitations of the research process in section 3.6 and summarise the chapter in section 3.7.

### **3.2 Research Methods**

The research methods constitute the tools and techniques for collecting evidence necessary for answering the research questions, and for analysing and interpreting data. Other components of the research method are the methods for evaluating the research and the ethical compliance of the research. Choice of method is based on the context, purpose, and nature of the research study in question (i.e. the research problem, the methodological assumptions the researcher holds, and the nature of the objects being investigated (Sayer 1992; 2009: p2; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p8).

### **3.2.1 Research Design**

The research design is the 'masterplan' by which the researcher makes choices and decisions about what phenomenon to study (the conceptual framework); about the strategy and approaches to adopt (methodology); about the tools and techniques for collecting the data, analysing and interpreting them, and the methods for evaluating and ensuring ethical compliance of the research (methods) and deciding how long the study will last (time frame), all aimed at achieving a valid and reliable research work. It is an oft-iterated, evolving framework (Mouton 1996: p175) and is based on the researcher's underlying philosophical perspectives (Yin 2003b) with its focus being to answer the research questions. A faulty or a 'weak' research design can disconnect the research question from the evidence and invalidate the research findings.

Wall and Wood (2005) and Boselie *et al.* (2005), following what they referred to as a 'critical assessment', faulted the claims by empirical researchers that a link exists between HRPs and organisational performance. Citing the reviewed empirical

studies as having weak research designs, they made a case for '*stronger* research methods and design'. CR, when properly applied, can provide a *robust* research design seen by Wall and Wood (2005) as the panacea for the evidence problem in HRM-P debate.

I lay the blocks of the design starting with the discussion of the research approach which feeds into the research strategy in follow-on sections.

### **3.2.2 Research approach**

The link problem is the *problem of proving existence or not* of an object or relational property - a relationship or link between HRPs or a SHRP and OFP. The 'black-box' problem like Fleetwood and Hesketh (2006b) stated is *a problem of explanation* of the nature of complex interacting causal mechanisms which constitute the HRM-P link or 'black-box'. Some research use 'illuminating the black box' to refer to explaining the processes by which HRPs may or may not lead to Organisational performance (Katou 2010).

The research questions require a deep exploration of the interaction between the HRPs as administered in an organisation and the beneficiaries of it (the employees and other stakeholders) all viewed as objects interacting with other objects in context. A descriptive qualitative research approach is required for such deep exploration to occur. Alternative research approaches could be: 'logical theoretical research', 'quantitative experimental research', and 'participatory action research' (See Denzin and Lincoln 1995; Johannessen 1992; Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Walsham 1995a). Within qualitative research, I

selected non-interpretive (or descriptive) and interpretive schemes. The approach involves using multiple sources for data, including using instruments such as participant observation, questionnaires and interviews taken from a real organisation (See Strauss and Corbin 1990; Miles and Huberman 1994 for details on descriptive-type qualitative research). The approach is justified in part because the objects such as a SHRP, OFP, Felt obligation, etc. and their relationships are social, complex, and emergent with their properties difficult, if not impossible, to quantify and measure. Another justification for this approach is the desire to provide rich information. Difficulty of quantification and/or measurement implies there is little or no need for statistical analysis techniques for their exploration. Using a quantitative experimental research approach or positivist-based quantitative approach would therefore defeat the objectives. Since the problem is not that of searching out, or verifying, or confirming a theory but that of understanding why things are the way they are (i.e. it is a problem of explaining and causality), a theoretical research approach where inductive modes of inference would be applicable is not desirable. Since “meaning” is of essential concern to the qualitative approach (Bogdan and Bilken 2003), I shall focus on the participant’s perspectives on their own perceptions of HRPs as used in the organisation and how they have influenced them and the organisation. The meaning attached to the data can be interpreted retroductively to reach down to the structures and arrive at conclusions about the questions posed. With a descriptive-interpretive qualitative approach selected, the next decision point is the research strategy to use to tackle the problem.

### **3.2.3 Research strategy**

Research strategy is defined as the general plan (Saunders *et al.* 2009: p600) or direction (Remenyi *et al.* 2003) of how the researcher will approach answering the research questions; or a general orientation to the conduct of the research (Bryman 2008: p698).

The criteria set for choosing a research strategy are based on the type of research question, the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and the degree of focus on contemporary or historical events (Wedawatta and Ingirige 2012; cf. Yin 2003b); the extent of existing knowledge on the subject area to be researched; the amount of time and resources available; and the philosophical underpinnings of the researcher (Ibid. ; cf. Saunders *et al.* 2009). Case study, experimental design, survey, participatory action research, grounded theory and ethnography are examples of research strategies (Saunders *et al.* 2009) from which one can choose.

### **3.2.3.1 The Case study as a Research strategy**

Even though case study strategy has limitations, its coherence and rigour notwithstanding (Easton 2010), I have selected it as research strategy for this thesis because it uses 'case' samples which provide the power of case settings; it is amenable to different research techniques; it helps the researcher make in-depth analysis; it can provide novel and interesting results; and it is compatible with CR. I discuss these themes one by one.

The use of case - a small sample or example

Case study research is useful in cases where ‘an in-depth study of a particular research problem is used to narrow down a very broad research problem into one or a few easily researchable examples - case(s) (Ibid.). In cases where little is known about an issue or phenomenon, a small sample (a case) may be a wiser strategy in studying what might be a complex phenomenon (Anastas 1999). The power of case settings make them amenable to being used to try to answer specific research questions which seek a range of different evidences (Gillham 2000: p1). Case study research is useful in cases where the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clearly defined’ (Yin 2003b) and settings where the researcher has very little control over the events under study (Schell 1992). Specifically, the main units of analysis (real objects) in HRM-P phenomenon are, for example, organisation, employees, attitudes, relationships, tasks, routines, and perception. Access to these objects can be very difficult as they have complex structures internally and externally and can be part of a very complex web - an open system (not closed system) - so that isolating individual social objects for examination can be an arduous task and their transparency grossly uncertain. As a result of these, a case study which takes a single case, with a small number of such objects “can provide a great deal of, largely qualitative data, which can be written up as a case study” (Easton 2010: p118-9; Flyvbjerg 2006).

#### Amenability to different research techniques

Case research accommodates a combination of different research techniques and approaches (including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed), different data types and data collection and analysis techniques (Yin 2003a, b). It makes use of multiple

methods and sources of data collection such as interviews, questionnaires, panel interviews, and direct and participant observations (Yin 2003b; McMillan and Schumacher 2001; Merriam 1998: p28) and multiplicity of perspectives rooted in a specific context (Ritchie and Lewis 2003).

#### Deep investigation suitable for ontology-based designs

Case study method helps the researcher understand a phenomenon in-depth and comprehensively (Easton 2010) and justifies itself by the interesting and novel nature of the results (Ibid.). Also, intensive case research can provide deep investigation which may not be achieved using other strategies based on cross-sectional studies. Being that this thesis is a time-delimited study, I cannot embark upon a longitudinal study.

#### Compatibility with CR and users

From the foregoing, case study research is compatible with CR with its amenability to different techniques and strategies (Ibid.). Here is a proponent's view.

'Critical Realism is particularly well suited as a companion of case research. It justifies the study of any situation, regardless of the number of study units involved, but only if the process involves thoughtful, in-depth research with the objective of understanding why things are as they are' (Ibid.: p119)

Some researchers have used case study research based on Critical Realist perspective in their empirical studies. Easton (2010) used Critical Realist case study research in examining the development of buyer-seller relationship after the installation of a new MIS system in industrial marketing studies. Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b and Bygstad *et al.* (2016) used Critical Realist case study research in the case of an airline company where the focus was on trying to understand the relationship

between IT capabilities and business innovation by the identification of mechanisms. Bhaskar in Bhaskar (2010) used it in climate change Critical Realist case research. There are a few other empirical studies using Critical Realist case study research but I must mention that case studies can be conducted according to other philosophical positions. For instance, Rezgui and Miles (2009) used it though adopting a positivist perspective; Sexton and Barrett (2003) used case study though adopting an Interpretivist/Realist/Pragmatist perspective.

#### Criticism - Limited data

Critics of case study research always point to the limited data collected from using it thereby, in their opinion, invalidating generalisation of its findings. Proponents of case study research argue that it is limited only in the sense that it does not cover a large sample size (Easton 2010) but its findings are theoretically generalisable with the argument that “looking at multiple actors in multiple settings enhances generalizability” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). The many strengths of case study research stated above and its usually interesting outputs weigh more than the alleged weakness of non-generalisation. Without conceding, a greater flaw in research design would ensue were a researcher to be insisting on generalisation based on sample size where deep investigation and contextualisation are not assured especially when researching a complex phenomenon such as HRM-P. I will comment further on the sample size issue for case research in sub-section 3.5.1 while discussing ‘data collection’.

Having discussed the potential of a case study research strategy for solving the research problem of inconclusive evidence in HRM-P debate, I follow it up with a discussion of the rationale for case selection.

### **3.2.3.2 Case selection strategy**

A selection strategy looking to pick a representative case or a random sample may not be appropriate since my objective is to acquire in-depth rich information (Flyvbjerg 2006: p231). Flyvbjerg, without suggesting a technique but pointing to experience, suggests that researchers should identify and select what he called a 'critical case - one having strategic importance in relation to the general problem' where the researcher looks for what he called 'the most likely case' or 'the least likely case' i.e. 'cases which are likely to either clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions and hypotheses' (Ibid.). This contrasts with 'extreme case' – 'well suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way' (Ibid.). I adopt a purposeful sampling method being the most common sampling strategy used in qualitative research because it provides me with the opportunity to do a 'non-random method of sampling', selecting cases rich in information for in-depth study (Patton 2002). I also needed a sample that offers me the platform to learn the most (Merriam 1998) about the phenomenon. I discuss case selection and sampling procedure in section 3.5.1 below.

The research questions seek to answer if there exists a causal connection/link between a SHRP and OFP i.e. if HRM-P link exists?; and If a HRM-P link truly exists, what is the link like, i.e. what is the nature of the 'black box'. CR provides a platform

to probe the real domain constituting real structures and mechanisms and is powerful for answering the 'why' and how a SHRP influences OFP and accounts for contextual mechanisms that moderate the effect of key mechanisms. Consequently, I have adopted a Critical Realist quasi-longitudinal qualitative descriptive-interpretive case research design. Holding the descriptive-interpretivist, subjectivist, and value-laden assumptions, a Critical Realist philosophical perspective best suits the nature of the research problem and the research questions. The research design adopted allows for a case of a petroleum company to provide the setting and data depicting the complex social processes at work in the organisation revealing multiple actors/stakeholders - potential beneficiaries to the HRPs. I discuss in the next section the rationale for data collection, data analysis, and research evaluation.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

It has often been claimed that the limited CR-based empirical research was due to a lack of a more explicit methodology for data analysis which could help researchers identify mechanisms (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b). Valid as the claim is, empirical research would benefit from a CR informed methodology for, not only data analysis but also for data collection. While Bygstad & Munkvold (Ibid.) and Easton (2010) and a few others have focused on the former, I do not know of any work that focused on the latter. I show here how an explicit methodology for data collection – one informed by CR meta-theory - could be approached and show the same for data analysis in chapter 5.

To answer the research questions about the existence or not of a relationship between a SHRP and OFP and the nature of such relationship where it exists, the

type of data required should be based on the research design - a Critical Realist quasi-longitudinal qualitative descriptive-interpretive case research design. It should be rich qualitative data, data amenable to interpretation and useful for drawing out meanings. One could use the theoretical and/or conceptual framework to address the research questions during data collection or analysis (Casanave and Li 2015: p108). But, I did not base my data collection on prior concepts coming out of the theoretical framework because I plan for methods based on grounded theoretic codes which could lead to new/substantive theories or modification of existing theories. So, the data was collected based on the research questions. Consequently, the interview questions were not necessarily derived and focused on the variables or concepts derived from the theoretical framework. I kept an open mind in the data collection, not allowing the prior concepts dictate the design of instruments, but only allowing them when they made sense.

The type of data is often coded for the most part, by the opinions, feelings, experiences, and inner thoughts of participants in the research. Data collection is hinged on the design of survey instruments, selection of source of data, i.e. subject selection and sampling procedure, technique, and time frame. I take these one by one.

### **3.3.1 Design of survey Instruments**

The main data collection instruments used in this thesis are interviews, questionnaires, participant observation, and opinion emails. Another data source was the researcher's experience or mental models. Table 3 below shows the data sources.

Cases	Data sources
Case company B	Pilot survey:  Questionnaires: 17 respondents
Case company S	Pilot survey:  Questionnaires: 10 respondents  2 panel group interviews – 6 employees in all  Participant observation
Main Case Company 'Wells'	Main case survey:  18 questionnaires; 8 individual interviews  1 Follow-up communication (Email feedback)
Supplementary data	Industry experience – as detailed in Appendix G.

Table 3: Data sources

### Interviews

The main advantages of interviews as instruments for data collection are that:

- a) They are useful for obtaining rich detailed information, more than questionnaires can provide (Shneiderman and Plaisant 2005);
- b) Few participants are needed to gather rich and detailed data (Ibid.);
- c) Since it affords the researcher direct contact with participants, the instrument enables the researcher to monitor the data type and quality and to assess if the data addresses the research questions so as to make corrections immediately.

The disadvantage is that interviews are a good platform for the researcher to influence the responses of the participants, potentially increasing the subjectivity of the responses obtained.

Depending on the need and design, interviews can be unstructured, structured, and semi-structured with individuals, or may be focus-group [panel] interviews as used during the pilot study phase. Also, there might be a temptation for researchers to view an interview transcript as a full account of the respondent's meaning, but this is unlikely to be the case with this thesis' research process where data return trips make meaning development of respondents' views an ongoing process. A semi-structured interview schedule was selected for this thesis because of its flexibility to allow use of both closed and open-ended questions which were really needed to dig deep into the structures and mechanisms that generate events. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires allow the flexibility for the researcher to interact with the interviewees without being disruptive and yet respond to new developments that will be useful for the research. During the pilot study phase (see details in sub-sections 3.3.3 and 3.3.5 and Appendix A), I used panel interviews in one of the pilot case companies- a company with no more than fifteen staff - to try to gauge the potency (instrument tuning) of the interview questions and compare the potency with non-panel interviews. I interviewed two groups in the company. The first group had four members while the second group had two members. Employees of the same or close seniority were placed in the same group to give respondents a relaxed atmosphere and reduce inhibitions for participants to challenge a colleague's opinion. I found the panel interviews useful for analysing the phenomenon of study which required deep thinking to provide illuminations to

events that have challenged researchers for some years now. Some ideas that individual respondents may miss either in questionnaires or individual interviews were elicited by discussion and interactive criticism of thoughts in panel interviews. Phrases often used in panel interviews by respondents such as 'I agree with him', or 'I disagree with the last speaker', 'as a follow-up to what she said', 'to throw more light on..', 'to add to that..' illustrate the value such interviews add to exploration of difficult and/or complex questions as this thesis posed. Due to the nature of the main case company (larger company with varied employee categories) and having drawn the benefits panel interviews offered from the pilot case which was for instrument tuning, I did not require and did not use a focus-group interview in the main case company. See Appendix B for examples of the interview questions.

### Questionnaires

A questionnaire is an instrument used to collect data in the form of the thoughts, experiences, feelings, views and opinions of respondents concerning the event or phenomenon being investigated. It may be prepared in hard paper format or served online electronically. Compared to interviews, questionnaires can take the inquiry to a larger sample or population but have the disadvantage of not being customizable to individual's sentiments, emotions, and contexts. The following three questionnaires were served manually in paper format and electronically (not automated) to the employees of the case company:

(i) Questionnaire A for all employees was taken by participants in the pilot as well as the main survey data collection phases;

(ii) Questionnaire B was given to management staff and directors. These questionnaires had more intricate questions and asked for information the participants answering questionnaire A may not be able to provide due to their positions in the company (see Appendix A for the description of the Pilot study).

In this thesis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The questionnaires given to participants were responded to in hard copies. Though the questionnaires could have been served electronically online, the manual hard copy option seemed pragmatic taking into consideration the unpredictable nature of the call-out to offshore assignments of some field-direct respondents and anticipated problems of uncertainty of internet facilities in those remote stations. The need to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of respondents was an issue due to the absence of helpful coordination in-Company. Using the instruments, I collected useful data from the respondents, data closely linked to their experiences and thoughts about the HRP's used in their company and how they perceive them and the shared meanings they have about these practices.

Below is a summary of data collection – what, how many, and from whom?

#### Pilot study

Questionnaires were sent to employees across the spectrum in Company B (20 sent, 17 completed and returned, 85% response rate); and employees across the spectrum in Company S (10 sent, 10 completed and returned, a 100% response rate). The managing director was this author who acted as participant observer (see sub-section 3.3.3). As for pilot study interviews, in Company B, I obtained permission to interview only the managing director but this could not hold due to scheduling

difficulties. In company S, I interviewed 2 panel groups differentiated by level of seniority so that employees in each group are of same or close seniority to provide maximum freedom for each employee to interrogate others' thoughts. The first panel group had two senior engineers while the second panel group had four junior engineers.

#### Main case survey in Wells

21 questionnaires were sent to employees across spectrum in Wells. 18 were completed and returned giving 86% response rate. Junior employees, engineers up to the General Manager completed the questionnaires. 8 employees from security personnel, engineers, etc., up to the founder/managing director were individually interviewed. No panel interviews were needed in the main case (see sub-section 3.3.5 for details).

I expected a challenge in the research activity especially in my ability to draw out 'what respondents and interviewees really mean' from 'their internal conversations' (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006) or in the effectiveness of the questionnaires and interview process to draw out how they interpret their narratives and to cajole them to be reflexive in the discourse. I also envisaged that some of the respondents, especially the HR Manager and Senior Managers may be unable to speak freely in order not to inadvertently release elements of company competitive strategy. I was right in my expectations. I had to navigate through company politics and employed diplomacy to gain the cooperation of key managers who I needed to interview due to their positions and role-relevance to the area of research. I will

briefly discuss next my interaction as researcher with human agents, politics and other elements in the organisation during data collection and feedback.

### **3.3.2 Subtleties in data collection**

The main case company is relatively a small company when compared, for instance, with British Petroleum. It has a strict organisational top-down structure. The impact of such a structure in the context of data collection activity is that employees (respondents) expect the explicit approval of the Managing director or implicitly his/her positive body language in order to, not only feel free to participate in the survey but to respond candidly with their views. One way I tackled this was to involve the Managing director in the survey at the interview stage (he did not have the time to respond to the questionnaire) and to have one of the senior Managers interface between me and him thereby signalling to the employees that the Company top hierarchy has some sort of approval for the research. In addition, I had to understand where the power resides among the senior and middle managers in order to route my questionnaires properly so it does not get stuck in company bureaucracy or officialdom. Aside visiting some senior Managers to get their commitment to assist me with scheduling the interviews and with disseminating of the questionnaires to their subordinates, I made sure that the senior people in operations and the human resource personnel were made to feel very important for the success of the research. Due to the fact that the petroleum industry is heavily leaning on the technical, from experience, I reckon that most personnel in operations (e.g. field engineers, technologists, etc.) feel more important or relevant than personnel in non-field-direct or non-operations-based services (e.g. HR

personnel, Account/Finance staff, etc.). Although this attitude is part of a changing culture, to ignore its existence might weigh against a researcher's data collection success. Needless to say that the efforts I made benefitted from my experience in the petroleum industry! It probably would have taken another researcher who does not have a petroleum industry experience a longer time, and probably a longer pilot phase, to understand these subtleties in the research process.

This scenario, upon reflection, makes one wonder whether some respondents are not unduly influenced by their organisation's corporate power play and whether they actually respond candidly or are conciliatory, endeavouring to align with company culture in their views. This is a reminder that respondents' views should be regarded as views not facts as yet. Data collection activity faces the challenge of needing to filter out these kinds of respondents where they exist so that the researcher collects quality data especially where deep investigation is important, where the researcher is interested in the 'internal conversations' of the respondents. It seems easier said than done. This brings again to the fore the arguments by Van de Ven (2007) and Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b for 'engaged scholarship' where extended roles are given to selected respondents in the research process. For the critics who require case study researchers to produce large sample size as requirement for generalizing their findings, the above scenario is a reminder that having a large sample size cannot guarantee that it benefits the research and warrants generalisation of findings.

While there are benefits in selecting a small company as case, the above narrative shows the challenges the researcher may face in data collection activity. Further research can therefore investigate the interaction between the researcher

and human agents in the organisation especially the impact of organisational or company's structure on data collection activity in general and on respondents' information in particular.

### **3.3.3 Participant observation (used at Pilot study phase)**

I was a participant observer in case company 'S' being an employee there (2012 to 2014) during the pilot study phase (see Appendix A for a description of the Pilot study). Using Company S as a control case, I tried to test the ideas (hypotheses or conjectures) which had been proposed by researchers (including myself) as having potential for "best" HRPs in petroleum or other organisations. Employees in Company S were used as a test (control) group. I tried to investigate if a 'particular causal mechanism' e.g. induction, training, job design, etc. has "tendency" to motivate the new hires and to impact their behaviour positively creating high productivity and low turnover and eventually affecting the company's financial performance; to capture "hermeneutic information" thus exploring the "intentions" of the workers and understand the tendencies possessed by the employees (see Appendix A for details of the control study in Company S. In the course of my normal job activities, I observed how HRPs affected the employees in the Company. Information collected from such participation became useful insight during the interpretation/sense-making of data (data analysis) and gave me some background knowledge during the interview sessions both in the pilot and the main study. Being involved in the company also provided me easier access to respondents during the pilot stage when the instruments were being adjusted.

Most collected data in qualitative research is reported data (Easton 2010). There is therefore an ontological gap<sup>12</sup> between researcher and event. In this sense, participant observation has an advantage. But, it also has disadvantages. First, researcher bias may set in during analysis. Second, respondents' reticence may ensue. Some employees may either be un-forthcoming in responding to a questionnaire from a senior colleague (as I was during participant observation) or may inadvertently slide into telling the researcher what s/he thinks the researcher wants to hear for fear of being victimised should the information s/he provided fall into management's hands, the ethics procedures notwithstanding. The foregoing statement does not imply that there was ever such tendency from this researcher.

### **3.3.4 Researcher's experience and mental models as data**

Importantly, as already mentioned, I have a major part of my work experience in the petroleum industry. This became useful to sometimes assure the valuable collaboration between researcher and respondents (e.g. in 'active interviewing') which the research strategy adopted warrants. Since I am fairly conversant with the mindset and thinking of petroleum company employees, I tried to get those of them who could to review their thoughts by playing the role of a devil's advocate', attacking their suppositions with my interview questions. In Appendix G, I discussed the experience and mental models used as data.

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<sup>12</sup> Reducing the ontological distance/gap will invariably reduce the epistemic gap. I define ontological distance as the distance between researchers and data created by the medium of respondents existing between researcher and data/event. Epistemic distance is the measure of the difficulty in researcher conceptualizing the objects created by the noise shielding the data or by the antecedent knowledge or prior concepts held by researchers. While the ontological distance takes place in the transitive dimension of knowledge, epistemic distance takes place in the intransitive dimension.

For a CR-informed methodology, it is advisable to start data analysis immediately after collecting the first batch of data, before collection is completed so that the researcher can have the opportunity to adjust the instruments as needed, to collect relevant data where more information is needed to throw more light to grey areas of the data. It is advised that the researcher continues the iterated process of data collection to data analysis and back until 'closure' is reached (Sayer 1992; Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b). Closure is reached when the mechanisms have been identified and can be authenticated or validated. Closure validates the explanatory power of the key mechanism identified and by extension when enough supplementary data has been collected. Such data collection design can be viewed as an intentional overlap designed between data collection and data analysis. There is the need for a radical review of aspects of the data collection techniques bequeathed by the mainstream approaches to social science research. This is especially so for CR-informed methodology if its potentials are to be fully realized. I shall comment further on this need in section 3.6 below under 'limitations of the research process.' Meanwhile, I discuss next how the case companies were selected for the pilot and main cases and the procedures used for sampling.

### **3.3.5 Subject selection and sampling procedure**

#### **Pilot study**

The two pilot case companies are 'critical' cases. They are smaller sized companies compared to the main case company. One of them is a start-up firm which is where I was a participant observer. I used this company as the control case company as it

was easier for me to obtain permissions for testing the questionnaires and interview questions and quickly obtain feedbacks from respondents. I initially tested/regulated and tuned the questionnaires and interview questions via a pilot study involving the two pilot case companies. Survey sample sizes are small (but this is expected for the type and size of companies I used for the survey in what was a case study, albeit cross-sectional study at this stage. Typical sample sizes in empirical research in the discipline used samples varying from less than 100 to less than 300 with response rates between 4% and 84% (Wall and Wood 2005). In both companies, respondents were taken across the companies ranging from senior employees to managing directors/consultants. Junior employees were not surveyed at this pilot stage since the tuning of the instruments and validating them was the primary objective. That my samples were between 10 and 20 (with 100 and 85% response rates respectively) for the two companies surveyed leaves a size effect which is not 'a secure foundation from which to generalize' (Ibid.). The sample size effect and rater biases leading to reliability-validity issues are some of the likely causes of 'inconclusivity of evidence' with the pilot survey. Aside from my intention to do some sort of 'quasi-longitudinal survey', I considered modifying the questionnaire such that the measures or ratings of HRPs and the measures of performance do not come from the same respondents/source especially with the senior management questionnaires. I initially thought that opting for a mixed method research design would contribute towards methodological pluralism. I also intended to obtain cumulative data by combining the data from interview with the data from questionnaires. The outcomes of these prior plans were not satisfactory. The questionnaires did not seem to be able to draw out the respondents' views, perceptions, and 'internal conversations', a

challenge I expected as expressed above under 'Questionnaire'. Check out the discussion on 'Technique' below as well. From the pilot experience, apart from receiving little quantitative data, the questionnaire responses were not 'digging deep' into ontological issues that could help the identification of mechanisms that could generate outcomes in the SHRP - OFP relationship and thus answer the research questions. The pilot result nonetheless showed a relationship between HRPs and HR and organisational outcomes (see Appendix A). The pilot study did not confirm the need for a mixed method design and for cumulating data as initially intended since very little quantitative information was retrieved in the push for a deep qualitative investigation which the research questions demand. I modified the questionnaire and interview questions. I used the questionnaires and then conducted semi-structured interviews in the main-case company. In the main survey, after the initial data analysis, I saw the need to adopt a qualitative approach, to give primary attention to semi-structured interviews while giving secondary attention to the questionnaires. This is warranted by the nature of the social objects being investigated and the research questions, and to obviate the unsatisfactory outcomes in the initial testing of the design instruments as narrated above.

#### Main case

I selected the main case Company Wells because it is a mid-size petroleum company in Nigeria with a good exposure to the local economy and to the culture. With manpower of over 150, its employees can be grouped as juniors, seniors, managers and senior managers and directors. Many in the senior grade up to the directors have worked for local and multinational firms, and so have experiences and

exposures that could add depth and breadth to the data collected. Besides, I believe that bureaucratic bottlenecks are reduced with mid-size companies compared to large multinationals. In effect, the main case Company Wells is a 'critical case' with an internal structure that allows the researcher freedom to interact with the respondents. What is more, Wells is at the stage in its growth where it is receptive to new ideas and able to monitor changes in its processes and affairs. These attributes, it was hoped, would provide a platform for a 'quasi-longitudinal' study though this did not materialize. Wells has operational offices in two towns in Nigeria and study participants were selected from both locations for spread. In contrast, a start-up firm would present me with little information owing to few staff strength, little exposure and experience of the majority of its employees. Having so far described the tools designed for data collection, I turn now to the technique employed for collecting data.

### **3.3.6 Technique**

One aim of a data collection technique is for the researcher/interviewer to try to get the subjects – respondents - to reflect and transcend empirical reality, and to adequately describe their experiences and perceptions using their concepts and imaginations. Only respondents who can do these can qualify as informants in 'engaged scholarship'. Van de Ven (2007) and Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b have argued for engaged scholarship where extended roles are given to selected respondents in the research process. I have employed this approach since I believe that the gap between the event and the researcher can be closed if the researcher can identify and select knowledgeable respondents. Though this is subjective, I

sought during the research process respondents I would return to during 'further data trips'. The respondents would have to be those who are able to use their cognitive, perceptive and imaginative powers to transcend the empirical while answering the questions during interviews or while completing the questionnaires.

It can be a challenge to get a good percentage of respondents interviewed meeting the above criteria because humans, unlike computers, cannot maintain consistency for long times in cognitive processing. Aware of this, I took note of and compared the response of employees in the HR function and those of managers when compared to those of the junior employees, evaluating who to return to for data trips and to feedback on my findings.

Smith and Elger (2012: p16); cf. Macdonald and Hellgren (2004: p265) argued that senior managers are not necessarily the most knowledgeable about what is going on in the organisation and that junior to middle managers may know better 'on specific matters'. I agree with this view based on my experience interviewing the respondents as I found junior to middle managers having a fuller grasp of the impact of some HRPs on employees' attitudes and behaviours and on the core operations. Smith and Elger also appreciate the 'active, investigative and analytically-informed orientation of the critical realist interviewer' (Ibid.: p26) in helping to generate the type of data sought, which orientation they argue influences the collaborative role of the interviewee, aimed at arriving at the research agenda. They, nonetheless, recognise that through interviews and questionnaires, researchers cannot access the whole picture and that while 'interviews are necessary for accessing human thought, meaning and experience,....they are not by themselves an adequate basis for analysing the multiplicity of causal factors in play in social relations' (Ibid.: p18)

highlighting that they 'have not embraced a strongly defined uniform stance on the implications of their philosophical stance for social research interviewing' (Ibid.: p19). I turn now to discuss the decision on the time frame designed into the research.

### **3.3.7 Time frame**

This thesis is time-bound and cannot afford the resources to do a longitudinal study which serves best when a 'why' question is being explored as in this case. Since longitudinal study is expensive and time consuming, I planned to use what I called a quasi-longitudinal case study as a compromise. By this I intended to return to the main case-study company after about 6 months from the first batch of data collection and after presenting management with interventional measures suggested to them earlier in the data collection stage, to check for the effect of suggested new or modified HRM practices on the workforce. As planned, I returned 6 months after my first batch of data collection to the main case company - 'Wells' - to collect more data and to check for the effects of interventional measures earlier suggested to management. Unfortunately, this procedure was not completed because the main case Company - Wells - was impacted by the oil industry glut and the recession in Nigeria between 2015 and 2017. The quasi-longitudinal feature was therefore not concluded. The research design reverted to a cross-sectional study as a result. Nevertheless, I re-emphasise that 6 months is not enough time for the effects of the HRP interventional measures to manifest were they to have any effect at all on the employees or in the workplace. I highlight here that I checked my findings/interpretations with some selected respondents and report their comments

in chapter 5 below. Next, I describe briefly the rationale for an explicit CR methodology for data analysis even though I will detail the description in chapter 5.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

After collecting data, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and the questionnaires transformed into descriptive narratives. The initial plan was to subject the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews to qualitative analysis of text using software like NVIVO or LEXIMANCER or ATLAS.ti to draw out recurring concepts and meanings and subject them to Critical Realist-type thinking and reflexive interpretation. I changed plan because the volume of the data was huge and because I needed to stay close to the data. I resorted to manual transcription and analysis. I did the manual transcription myself in order to avoid errors that may creep in due to contracting out the transcription to a service company identified abroad. I suspected that a contractor transcriber based overseas may have a hard time dealing with the pronunciation and cultural sense of the recorded voice data. Needless to say, manual data handling and packaging was time-consuming and tedious though interesting. Usually, data analysis goes on hand in hand, back and forth (iteratively) with data collection to guide the type of data collected and to aid the researcher in achieving closure.

Qualitative data analysis has been defined as “working with the data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesising them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan and Bilken 2003). I devised an eextended framework for data analysis (see Chapter 4) which served as a three-part data

analysis tool comprising 1) GT data analysis; 2) CR data analysis; and 3) the use of theoretical frames to seek patterns in the data to explain the phenomenon and address the research questions.

GT coding was used to discover patterns, codes, concepts, categories, themes and meanings. The CR data analysis part built on and extended the framework made popular by some CR scholars. The objective in this part of the analysis is to identify mechanisms which generate events in our world. Part of a research process is to employ the theoretical framework to frame the study addressing the research questions during the data analysis and interpretation stages (Merriam 1998: p70). Data from the cases in the pilot stage, the participant observation, and the panel interviews were compared with data from the main survey case as a form of triangulation for corroboration in situations where there was need to throw more light on an event or a category. Because of the novelty of the extended framework, I use chapter 4 to describe in details the process of a CR-GT data analysis before implementing it in chapter 5.

Knowledge claims cannot be relied upon by the scientific community if the methodology employed has no method to evaluate research and by so doing validate the data, the data analysis technique, and the findings. Evaluation techniques are very important though very contentious for social science research since much of literature on the methodologies touching evaluation emanates from quantitative positivist researchers. Next, I discuss the methods for evaluating the research.

### 3.5 Evaluating the research<sup>13</sup>

The traditional criteria for ensuring the credibility of research data—objectivity, reliability and validity— which are mostly used in quantitative positivist studies are hardly applicable to qualitative type research due to the stated nature of social objects (Merriam 1998: p199; Christie *et al.* 2000; cf. Miles and Huberman 1994; Yin 1989). Instead of using the construct ‘validity’ for evaluating or assessing qualitative research, qualitative social science researchers prefer to use the stringed construct ‘the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings’. The extent to which the data and data analysis is believable and trustworthy is contingent on its trustworthiness.

Four ‘strategies’- credibility, transferability or generalizability, dependability, and confirmability constructed parallel to the analogous quantitative criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality have been suggested for gauging the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln 1981; Krefting 1991; Creswell 1998; Christie *et al.* 2000). Christie and colleagues added construct validity as the fifth approach even though it is replaced by trustworthiness by qualitative researchers for reasons earlier stated. Each strategy in turn uses criteria like reflexivity, triangulation and dense descriptions (*Ibid.*)’. I briefly describe below what the four strategies mean for qualitative research.

#### Credibility

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<sup>13</sup> Much of this section drew ideas from Maxwell (1992); Creswell (1998); and Altheide and Johnson (1994).

Credibility (analogous to internal validity) in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy (Ibid.; cf. Miles and Huberman 1994; Yin 1989). It points to how the research findings match reality, not forgetting that subjectivity implies the possibility of multiple realities. Merriam (1998) provides the following six strategies to enhance credibility in qualitative research:

- Triangulation: This strategy involves using multiple sources of data or techniques to confirm emerging findings. I used questionnaires, individual interviews, panel interviews, participant observation, and literature review, employing the data for triangulation;
- Member checks: Here the researcher cross-checks initial interpretations with respondents and asks further questions about their plausibility;
- Using longitudinal study where possible;
- Cross-checking with peers;
- Engaging in collaborative research and;
- Clarifying researcher's assumptions from the outset.

Aside from multiple sources of data, and the planned quasi-longitudinal study which did not materialise, I employed member checks/feedback on findings to check on the trustworthiness/credibility of the findings for this thesis.

Generalizability

Generalizability (other scholars may refer to this as 'Transferability' and so can be used interchangeably) is analogous to external validity, that is, the extent to which findings can be generalized (Christie *et al.* 2000; cf. Miles and Huberman 1994; Yin 1989). Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular case to other cases, times or setting than those directly studied (Maxwell 1992). Seale (1999) advocates that transferability is achieved by providing a detailed, rich description of the settings studied to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know (Ibid.: p45). Whilst transferability is difficult with qualitative research due to the subjectivity issue, a qualitative researcher can nevertheless enhance transferability by detailing the research methods, contexts, and assumptions underlying the study. Detailed description of the component objects in the events being analysed and abstracting the objects would enhance generalizability as well. I return to this generalizability issue as one of the weak points of the research process in section 3.7. For CR-informed methodology, the mechanisms that are thought to generate the events operate contextually. Mechanism M1 can cause Y depending on the states of other mechanisms (contextual mechanisms) C1, C2...Cn. Critical Realists will not generalize a particular finding that M1 does Y without being sure of the contextual mechanisms' states. I have tried to enhance transferability using the steps enunciated above.

### Dependability

Dependability is analogous to reliability (Christie *et al.* 2000). A research finding is dependable if we can replicate the results or findings using similar subjects in similar

contexts (Merriam 1998: p205). This underlines the importance of tracking the changing contexts and circumstances during the research process. Since reliability in the traditional sense is not practicable in a qualitative case study, Merriam suggests that reliability should be determined by whether the results are consistent with the data collected. Another name for dependability is confirmability of the findings which is the degree to which the research findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Christie *et al.* 2000). It is analogous to objectivity, that is, the extent to which a researcher is aware of or accounts for individual subjectivity or bias. For Seale (1999), dependability can be achieved through auditing which consists of the researcher's documentation of data, methods and decisions made during a research study as well as its end products. Auditing for dependability requires that the data and descriptions of the research should be elaborate and rich. It may also be enhanced by altering the research design as new findings emerge during data collection. Auditing could be used to establish confirmability whereby the researcher makes a 'methodological self-critical account of how the research was done' (Ibid.). In order to make auditing possible by other researchers, it is a good idea that the researcher archives all collected data in a well-organised, retrievable form so that it can be made available to them if the findings are challenged. I have tracked the changing contexts and circumstances during the research process as can be shown in the various appendices and in the chapters.

### Triangulation

Triangulation is the major approach used to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Triangulation arose from an ethical need to confirm the

validity of the processes. In case studies, triangulation is achieved by using multiple sources of data (Yin 2003b), multiple informants, and multiple methods (e.g., participant observation, focus groups, member checking, and so on), in order to gather multiple perspectives on the same issue so as to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomena (Painter and Rigsby 2005). Triangulation is also used to compare data to decide if it corroborates (Creswell 1998; Patton 2002; Brannen 2004: p314), and to uncover biases (Blaikie 2000; Scandura and Williams 2000) when there is only one researcher investigating a phenomenon and thus, to validate research findings. At the pilot stage I used participant observation, panel interviews, questionnaires, and multiple informants as triangulation and in the main case survey, I used questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, taking respondents to cut across employee levels in the organisation, and feedbacks post-analysis as triangulation technique.

As part of the research process, protecting the respondents during and after the research is a key consideration. I discuss next the ethical considerations I made.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Social science research includes codes of conduct that are aimed at protecting the research participants from physical, mental, and/or psychological harm (Chilisa 2005). The codes of conduct prescribe that the researcher must protect the participants by assuring the anonymity of the participants who offered information including respecting their privacy (Silverman 2000: p201), preserving their rights (Creswell 1998) and the confidentiality of their responses (Miles and

Huberman 1994); that the researcher must get the informed consent of the participants and ensure that participation is voluntary (Ibid.). The Ethics committee of the University approved my ethical guidelines and approved the conduct of the research before I started data collection. Ethical practice can assure the legitimacy of the research and address potential ethical issues. I have taken ethical issues into consideration in data collection and in all aspects of the research process. Steps were taken to get the consent of respondents and their organisations prior to interviews and surveys, by completing appropriate consent forms and organisational confidentiality agreements. Moreover, participants of the study were made aware of the purpose of the study and those who will have access to the data at present or in the future. I made sure the participants were made aware of what use their data, in the form of questionnaires, interviews, and email opinions, will be put to and if publishing them will take place. They were expressly informed that their views will never be handed to their organisations and that I had intentionally provided mechanisms to ensure that their views and information are not traceable to their names in any way (see Appendix H for the consent form). For instance, I made optional the recording of names or job positions in the self-administered questionnaires.

I was a participant observer in case company 'S' being an employee there during the pilot study phase. This period of employment reduced, in my opinion, the time I would have spent in the pilot phase because I was able to have access directly to the employees whose views I needed to tune the instruments. I constantly reminded myself of the need not to influence their views – to keep an

epistemological distance. Panel interviewing was a good technique to really have the employees feel comfortable and express themselves encouraged by the participation of their peers. To reduce the pressure on me to keep a distance and so maintain objectivity, it was necessary that the main case survey took place in a company I was not participating as an employee. That was the case.

The interpretations from the questionnaires and interviews were discussed with selected respondents as to whether they make sense in the context of the surveyed company. I provided the main survey case company with some level of the results of my research findings so that they may benefit by re-designing their HR practices to their organisational benefits. Interventional measures were suggested to senior management in the course of data collection and analysis hoping to have the opportunity to return to the company to check their effects and to check the initial findings with the respondents, steps which aided the evaluation of the research. In general, I constantly was alert to detect any unethical issues during the course of the research especially ensuring that voluntary participation and confidentiality of the response of participants were given primacy. From my own point of view, there were no unethical issues discovered in the course of the thesis.

Having discussed all the elements of the research process, a discussion of the limitations of the research process (done in the next section) would validate the research and offer opportunities for other researchers to make methodological contributions.

### **3.7 Limitations of the research process**

Given the chosen research process – a Critical Realist descriptive-Interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study research with retroduction, thematic aspects that are limiting are in the weaknesses of case study research; the time frame the research design affords; and the limitations of the faculties of human subjects and researchers. These are exhibited in the extent to which case findings may/may not be generalisable given the small sample size of case settings; the limits of cross-sectional studies; the issue of engaged scholarship and role of respondents; and the problem of a Critical Realist interviewer and his/her orientation. I explicate these themes.

#### *The weaknesses of case study research*

Critics of case study research argue that its results, especially when qualitative data are used, are not representative of all cases and ‘statistically non-generalizable’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Denzin and Lincoln however countered that case studies can be theoretically generalised, arguing that “looking at multiple actors in multiple settings enhances generalizability”. Similarly, Yin (2003b) argued that case studies are used for analytical generalisations, where the researcher’s aim is to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theoretical propositions. Tellis (1997) further played down non-generalisability and non-representativeness insisting that the emphasis is on what can be learned, that is, how knowledge can be advanced, from a single case or few cases. My view is that the subjective epistemology of the process and the challenge to evaluate the research leaves the process vulnerable to attack by peers who oppose qualitative case study research. Though experts admonish that a detailed description and auditing be done by the qualitative

researcher, one wonders how much description, detailing, and auditing is enough. I can only state here that thoroughly evaluating the research should aid the validation of the results. The use of qualitative data is another issue for critiques of case research. Though we can collect rich and often complex data by it, the data is often open to different interpretations with attendant potential 'researcher bias' (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Cornford and Smithson 2005). Rich collection for a single case with a small sample size usually results in large amounts of data which, as I experienced in this research, makes data handling and operation tedious, especially for researchers who in a bid to stay close to data opt for manual transcription and sometimes manual data analysis.

#### *The problem of cross-sectional versus longitudinal studies*

Time limitation is an issue for a time-bound research such as this. Seeking to determine the cause of events, to answer the 'why' question requires time. Cross-sectional case research or even quasi-longitudinal case research (which I tried to do) would be inadequate. Longitudinal case research would be a better design for this process if it were possible. The effect of a SHRP in an organisation may or may not be unperceived (unobserved) and unperceivable (unobservable) (Easton 2010: p123) and if perceived at all, takes a long time to be perceived (observed) given the limits of the perceptive powers of humans. Accordingly, it is difficult to tell how much time is required in order to classify a research design as robust and appropriate.

*Engaged scholarship and the case for selected respondents (Van de Ven 2007; Bygstad and Munkvold 2011a; Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b)<sup>14</sup>*

I had earlier in the chapter cited Van de Ven and Bygstad & Munkvold as having argued for engaged scholarship where extended roles are given to selected respondents in the research process. One aim of a CR data collection technique is for the researcher/interviewer to try to get the subjects – respondents - to reflect and transcend empirical reality, and to adequately describe the objects of investigation using their concepts and imaginations. Only respondents who can do these can qualify as informants in ‘engaged scholarship’. It is a challenge to get a good percentage of respondents to meet the above criteria. Given that few qualify, one wonders if using the full range of respondents across the levels in a case organisation is necessary for collecting the kind of data sought for these sorts of research questions.

*The problem of the Critical Realist interviewer and his/her orientation (Smith and Elger 2012: p26)*

It is uncertain whether the research process can provide a collaborative role between the interviewer and interviewee in the efforts to generate the kind of data sought. The structure of mainstream approaches like positivist-based research to interview and questionnaire designs makes this difficult. Smith and Elder recognise that through interviews and questionnaires, researchers cannot access the whole picture and that while ‘interviews are necessary for accessing human thought in

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<sup>14</sup> The authors define the concept of ‘engaged scholarship’ popularised by Van de Ven (2007) in the article ‘Role of informants in interpretive case study’ as a way of the researcher extending the role of some selected informants/respondents in the research process beyond just collecting data from them thereby enhancing the researcher-practitioner relationship.

social relations'....they are not by themselves an adequate basis for analysing the multiplicity of causal factors in play (Ibid.: p18). Little or no explicit work has been done on CR research method in general and in particular instrument design, the bedrock for an ontology-based philosophical approach or method. For example the structure of interviewing can be an area to start for CR-based methodology if its potentials are to be fully extracted. The way a question is asked should influence the answers (data) received. I contend that most of social science research survey instruments have been designed leaning towards epistemology and induction or deduction instead of ontology and retroduction, failing to accommodate the limitations of the various human agents involved with the research process and the constraints mentioned above. I suggest that a CR question design must follow the CR research process and carry the researcher and respondents through to retroduction. It will be best, especially for a CR case research, to set bounds during instrument designs so as to focus the question design and to explore ontological depth. It makes sense to focus on the particular (not general) events/incidents/social interactions that touch the phenomenon we wish to study. While a recruitment event is part of an organisation's HR practices, for our purposes in this project (our phenomenon of interest is the HRP-OFPP event with particular focus on the impact of training and development and rewards and benefit practices as HRP), it will be better for this research to ask questions around the training school events or the event where employees resigned for not being rewarded appropriately. Trivial as this may seem, the impact such focus has on ontology is revealing during data analysis. Example of focused question can be: 'Are there instances where Wells has had financial improvement due to enhanced training and development practices? If Yes, why? If

No, why not? Please explain'. [Repeat this question with rewards and benefits practices]. Focusing the questions can lessen the tediousness of qualitative data analysis by reducing the number of data trips the researcher embarks upon overall; reduce the work load of transcribing interviews especially when done manually like was done in this thesis; filters out not- too-useful data; releases researcher's and respondents energy; and systematizes the CR research process. It drives the research towards a 'structure of causal explanation' (Easton 2010: p121). There is the need to rethink the research methods. A radical review of aspects of the data collection techniques bequeathed by the mainstream approaches to social science research is needed. The limitations of the research process selected are outweighed by the capability it presents in answering the research questions and solving the research problem. Next, I summarise the chapter.

### **3.8 Summary**

The presupposition of a closed system (which implies the existence of regularity of events) for a complex social phenomenon and a statistical prediction objective weakens most positivism-leaning empirical research in the HRM-P debate. So far, with these positivist assumptions, empirical research in the HRM-P link is unable to produce the kind of evidence that validates the alleged emergence of OFP from HRPs. Constructionist/Interpretivist methodology or postmodernist methodology would not fare better because they do not provide better accounts of reality since they have misplaced ontologies. Not all aspects of reality can be socially constructed nor reduced to meanings given to it by humans. The views of these

three paradigms about reality and causality would not help deal with the research questions chosen for this thesis which are:

A) If a SHRP causes or influences productivity (PR), employee turnover (TO), and OFP through stimulating employees' productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours and other stakeholders' behaviours; and B) If it does, what mechanisms, and other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP?

Based on the Critical Realist assumptions of a realist 'layered ontology', a relativistic-subjective epistemology, and an axiological subjective belief providing a better alternative methodology for answering the above research questions, one which can provide a robust research design shorn of the weaknesses of designs based on main stream approaches, I have argued therefore in this chapter for and adopted a research process based on a Critical Realist descriptive-Interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study research with retroduction. Given my adoption of a CR-informed methodology, a rethink of mainstream research methods becomes inevitable. Two issues arise in the operationalisation of a CR methodology. One is the need to develop explicit CR-informed data collection techniques different from mainstream techniques and two is the need to develop a novel framework for CR data analysis. Within the research process and design, both issues need to be informed by the theoretical framework which should be constructed with a CR meta-theory in mind. I have made suggestions on the former in this chapter (see section 3.5 above). I will discuss in the next chapter the process of a CR-informed data analysis including the rationale for my decision to integrate the CR data analysis techniques with Grounded theory data analysis techniques without ignoring the

utility of using existing theory guided by a theoretical framework, all parts of an extended data analysis framework.

## Chapter 4

### Describing the process of Critical Realist Data Analysis

'Researchers in social science always work in an open system, that is to say, the generative mechanisms we study operate in a complex interaction with other mechanisms, which either cooperate with or work against the mechanism in question. Our alternative is instead to reduce in thought the complex empirical reality, by means of abstraction. In addition to the fact that there are always cooperative factors, we must also take into account that a mechanism is sometimes active, sometimes dormant, and that there may sometimes be counteractive mechanisms preventing an empirical manifestation of an active mechanism' (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p199)

#### 4.1 Introduction

Empirical work based on Critical Realist (CR) approach has been limited (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Dobson *et al.* 2007). This assertion is supported by a review which found out that less than 5% of published work in CR, whether using qualitative or quantitative methods (Ibid.; cf. de Vaujany 2008), involved fieldwork. Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b argued that the limited CR-based empirical research was due to the 'lack of a more explicit methodology for data analysis' which could help researchers identify mechanisms (Ibid: p2) useful for causal explanation. See Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006); Katou (2010) for comments on lack of explicit methodology and coherent theory. Though Bunge had cautioned that there is no method or technique for uncovering mechanisms since, according to him, mechanisms are unobservable and cannot occur in empirical data (Bunge 2004: p201), Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) had suggested a useful framework for identifying these mechanisms during data analysis, arguing that, based on CR 'layered ontology', what we are investigating is the interplay of objects and structures, not the event-level regularities in the empirical data, implying that the mechanisms are 'associated with the nature of the object of study, not with the attributes of events' (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b: p4-5).

Tied to the dearth of a more explicit methodology or determinant of it is the often muted difficulty researchers endure in *explaining* the complex mental activities they engage in to produce knowledge. Meyer and Lunney observed that 'when writing about qualitative research methods, it is often difficult to explain the processes in how qualitative analysis is *actually* conducted' (Meyer and Lunney 2013). Bhaskar observed that 'qualitative *description* of a thing or account of its behaviour' is not an easy task for scientists...it 'requires great ingenuity' since 'the scientist must be able to describe it correctly, i.e. as being of the kind or type that it is' and will, in general, involve 'a theoretical re-description' of the thing (Bhaskar 1978: p178, 250). He specified that the 'causal and perceptual powers' and the 'conceptual and descriptive powers' of the scientist must be augmented by theoretical and experimental work if the production of the object of knowledge and the concepts is to be possible (Ibid.). Clearly, the problem enunciated so far requires a closer look at how CR have applied their meta-theoretical assumptions in data collection, analysis and interpretation.

The research design for this thesis is based in general, on a CR-informed methodology operationalized through an extension of existing frameworks for CR data analysis<sup>15</sup>. I have proposed a framework for data analysis based on an extension of existing CR data analysis frameworks by adding the core elements of the Grounded Theory (GT) approach to data analysis and highlighting what I termed 'a

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<sup>15</sup> In qualitative research, Grounded theory (GT) and CR are the two methodologies whose data analysis methods insist on repeating data collection after initial data analysis. GT does this through its strategy of theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation and CR through its requirement that data collection continues till epistemic closure is reached or even while validating key mechanisms.

data-analytic triangulation' as a sub-step for validating<sup>16</sup> the identification of mechanisms and thereby validating the data-analytic process. In the data analysis, I do a GT coding to category. Instead of having themes guide the analysis and interpretation, I allow the meta-theoretical concepts guide analysis. Later, I use the integrated theoretical framework to review the data analysis. In the CR part, I use structural analysis and causal analysis to identify mechanisms. GT has over the years evolved from what has now been termed classic GT to other variations, including what is referred to as Charmaz's constructivist GT. There has even been an evolution towards critical-realism underpinned methodologies, e.g. 'Critical Realist GT' (See Kempster and Parry 2011; Oliver 2011), a 'Transformational GT' (Redman-MacLaren and Mills 2015), and critical grounded theory (Belfrage and Hauf 2015; 2017). The framework proposed here might then be labelled as a CR grounded theoretic data analysis.

In Section 4.2, as a background for what follows, aware that CR meta-theoretical assumptions inform the development of a methodological framework for data analysis and interpretation (see Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2005a), following from chapter 2, placed here for proximity reasons so it is fresh in the mind of the reader, I describe in more details the epistemological activities featured in the framework for data analysis. With the background set, I conduct in section 4.3, a search for a suitable CR data analysis framework, making a case for an extended framework which is a synthesis of core elements of the classical GT data analysis and CR data analysis frameworks. The extended framework allows, as part of the research

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<sup>16</sup> The word 'validating' is not used here or anywhere else in the sense positivists use it. It stands for and could be replaced with 'authenticating'.

process, the employment of the integrated theoretical framework to frame the study drawing from existing theory as needed during data analysis in order to answer the research questions (Merriam 1998: p70). I operationalize the CR data analysis framework in section 4.4 laying grounds for its application to real empirical data in chapter 5. I conclude with a chapter summary in Section 4.5.

## **4.2 Epistemological Activities preferred by CR**

Because of space constraints I describe below only the key mental and analytical activities preferred by Critical Realists for data analysis.

### **4.2.1 Thought experiments**

Unlike in the higher strata social sciences, the natural sciences - lower strata sciences, 'can to a large extent develop knowledge of the mechanisms of nature by isolating them in experiments', for instance in laboratories, where more or less closed systems are created for observation (Danermark et al 2002) with the possibility of predicting natural phenomena. As CR holds, 'purely empirical observations of social phenomena' must be transcended if the complex multiplicity of mechanisms producing them must be explained. Ordinary experiments will not do for complex reality. 'Thought experiments' or 'thought operations' would be required (Ibid.). Danermark and colleagues suggest that 'generative social mechanisms' can be identified using 'conceptual abstraction' grounded in 'empirical conditions' by means of structural analysis (Ibid.). Thought experiments are viewed as imagination for experimentation (Ansell 2015); as some form of hypothetical (conjecture) and often counterfactual reasoning (i.e. an argument); and as intentional, structured intellectual deliberations (Cadle and Yeates 2004: p150). They

can be used to speculate the consequents of a given antecedent within a problem domain (Ibid.) or to draw novel conclusions about a particular phenomenon or to construct 'new representations of nature' and for conveying them to others thereby creating what has been termed 'major conceptual innovations' or 'conceptual change' (Nersessian 2012). Specifically, in respect of data analysis, using thought experiments, the researcher is able to find patterns including commonalties and similarities in the data (Maxwell 2012). In designing thought experiments, inference models, 'existing representations' and 'general world knowledge' are employed (Nersessian 2012), and in implementing it, conceptualisation, especially in social science research, is necessarily involved (Danermark *et al.* 2002).

#### **4.2.2 Retroduction and abduction as inference models**

Retroduction is 'a key form of thought operation in theorizing and theory generation' often leading to concept formation (Fleetwood 2013: p149). Thought operation or experiment via retroduction involves obtaining knowledge of the properties required for a phenomenon to exist by reasoning (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p206). Critical Realists view retroduction as a key epistemological process (Easton 2010). For them, by using retroduction, events are "explained by postulating and identifying mechanisms which are capable of producing them" (Sayer 1992: p127). In other words, retroduction enables causal explanation of events through its identification of the mechanisms which produce the events.

Abduction is employed for the 'creative development of conjectures to explain surprising observations that fall outside the realm of theory' (Ansell 2015),

and for the 're-interpretation of data' – moving forward from data (surprising observation) to review conjecture (Meyer and Lunnay 2013).

Retroduction, on the other hand, is used to 'critically examine the conditions responsible for the theory in question...in order to advance understanding' (Ansell 2015). It usually assists researchers in explaining their method of analysis (Meyer and Lunnay 2013) with its trademark 'moving backward from' conjectures to empirical observation (Ansell 2015) entailing a conceptualization - re-conceptualisation to identify objects and the relations between them. Cross-referencing Meyer and Lunnay (2013), mechanisms can be viewed as 'the conditions that suggest a phenomenon's existence'. By identifying the conditions that suggest a phenomenon's existence, conceptualization ensues (Ibid.).

Abduction and retroduction as thought experimental inferential processes used in conjunction are useful particularly in theory development (Ibid.; Easton 2010; cf. Danermark *et al.* 1997). Abductive-retroductive inference can for instance complement deduction as far as its explanatory limitations go and can be used to distinguish the actual from the real (Meyer and Lunnay 2013).

#### **4.2.3 Conceptualising objects, structures, and mechanisms**

"..., in the social sciences conceptualization is part both of the research process and the research object; in the natural sciences it is only part of the former..... The methodological implication of this is that conceptualization stands out as the most central social scientific activity." (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p36, 41)

Concepts are the thoughtful expressions or representations of the deep structures that generate the phenomena of our world (adapted from Bhaskar 1978: p20).

Whereas experiments are the principal methods natural scientists use to research

reality, social scientists focus on conceptualisation through conceptual abstraction which is done under different conditions than in the natural sciences due to the hermeneutic premises<sup>17</sup> (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p40). Conceptualisation serves as the starting point of every scientific attempt to understand and explain the world so that every research process must be able to relate the real world and the concepts we form of it (Ibid.: p15). It has been argued that it is possible to identify explanatory mechanisms through conjecture (Demetriou 2009: p443-7; Sayer 1992: p107). One methodological way to formulate conjectures building on systematic knowledge claims is to use abstraction (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b: p4-6) which is a form of conceptualization. I examine next abstraction and its forms as used in social science research.

#### 4.2.3.1 Abstraction

"Abstraction is necessary, because the domain of the actual – the events in the world – makes up such a tremendously diversified and heterogeneous dimension of reality.... Here, conceptual abstraction is used as a kind of social science equivalent to the natural science experiment." (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p42-3)

"An abstract concept or abstraction isolates in thought a one-sided or partial aspect of an object. What we abstract from are the many other aspects which together constitute concrete object such as people, economics, nation, institution, activities, etc." (Sayer 1992: p87)

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<sup>17</sup> In trying to explain what is referred to as the 'double hermeneutics of social science', Danermark and colleagues differentiate clearly between social and natural science arguing that 'their respective objects are essentially different' and that, 'society is made up of thinking and reflective human beings' who are capable of 'continually changing the social reality'; that the reality social scientists study is 'socially produced'; that because we study 'other people's interpretations of the social world...our object of study is thus socially defined'. They continued: 'We interpret the interpretations of other people' and try to have an understanding of significance and meanings people attach to actions and events in order to be in a position to explain the social world. We also strive to 'produce concepts, which make it possible to transcend common sense and attain a deeper understanding and explanation of a more abstract character...As researchers we are also a product of social interpretations' (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p200).

I discuss briefly how to conceptualise components of the real world starting with objects. Social scientists conceptualise objects of study through abstraction (a form of generalization<sup>18</sup>), which is also viewed as a kind of 'thought experiment' (Ibid.: p43). We abstract from a particular, concrete, specific feature of an object to a general, abstract feature of it; and for specific purposes, we must abstract from particular conditions, excluding those which have no significant effect in order to focus on those which have significant effects (Ibid.: p42; Sayer 1992: p85-7). Thus, for example, we can abstract from 'a degree-certificated-petroleum worker' to 'an employee'. Next, I show how social scientists conceptualise structures in a social system using structural analysis (a specialised form of abstraction which also has attributes of a thought experiment).

#### **4.2.3.2 Structural Analysis (Discovery of structures)<sup>19</sup>**

Structural analysis is a method to conceptualise and identify structures (Sayer 1992: p92) in a system where we are interested to understand not just the existence and nature but how objects interact and affect one another (interplay). A structure is 'a set of internally related objects' (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p47). The reason we make an abstract study<sup>20</sup> – 'an analysis of the structures involved in the social phenomenon under study' is because '[i]n every concrete situation there is a complex combination of formal and substantial, external and internal relations'(Ibid.). We abstract, that is isolate, a particular aspect, a set of internally

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<sup>18</sup> Generalisation gives greater prominence to quantitative descriptions and formal as opposed to substantial relations (Sayer 1992: p100).

<sup>19</sup> These ideas were influenced substantially by Sayer (1992: p92-3).

<sup>20</sup> Abstract analysis contrasts with a concrete analysis, where 'various separate events are studied and explained through the activity of the structural mechanisms involved' (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p47).

defined social relations: a particular structure, and further, should our investigation require it, 'continue to isolate more internal social relations, more structures' (Ibid.). Sayer in proposing a technique for discovering structures in social systems suggested that 'the *structure of a system of interest* can be discovered by asking simple questions about constituent relations: what does the existence of this object (in this form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? If not, what else must be present? What is it about the object that makes it do such and such?' (Sayer 1992: p91). In finding answers to these questions, the analyst must draw from antecedent knowledge and employ conjectures as well. When we consider existence and relations among objects, we focus on structures, hence the need for a structural analysis. When we consider causation and change, we focus on mechanisms, hence the need for a causal analysis (Ibid.: p103).

#### **4.2.3.3 Causal analysis**

The Realist view of causality is concerned not with the relationship between discrete events (cause and effect), but with the causal powers or liabilities of objects or relations or more generally the way of acting of objects or relations i.e. their mechanisms (Ibid.: p105). The nature or constitution of an object and its causal powers are internally or necessarily related' implying that 'if the nature of an object changes, then its causal powers will change too' (Ibid.). For example, the causal power of a petroleum worker is not reducible to her characteristic as an individual but derive from her interdependent relations with her colleagues, supervisors, petroleum industry tradition, etc. (adapted from Ibid.). By exposing the nature of the object (employee) – beliefs, anatomy, cognition, social inclusions, structures they

occupy, etc., we can discover what it is about the employee (e.g. petroleum professional or worker) that causes her to change behaviour when management, based on strategic objectives, decides to influence her with some inducements in the form of what management considers as better financially-rewarding HRPs.

Framed technically, our focus during CR data analysis is therefore to: i) identify the structural components of the mechanisms; ii) to understand how these components interact in order to produce the emergent outcome; iii) to identify and analyse the outcome tendency; iv) to identify the context (i.e. other mechanisms that influence the outcome) and; v) to properly describe all kinds of mechanisms identifiable because doing so enables us to attain explanation and understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Through the data analysis, an attempt will be made to produce the object of knowledge and the concepts of the object (Bhaskar 1978: p178).

Having considered the influence of key elements of CR meta-theory on data analysis, the stage is set for the consideration of a suitable methodology or framework to be used to operationalise the data analysis.

### **4.3. In search of a suitable Data Analysis framework**

Frameworks for data analysis, though few, have been constructed as ways of operationalizing qualitative data analysis in the social sciences. I consider the ones best suited for this research making a distinction between CR-based frameworks and others.

#### **4.3.1. Existing CR-based frameworks for Data Analysis**

The CR frameworks proposed by Danermark *et al.* (2002); Easton (2010) and Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) (also referred to as the mechanism approach) consist of steps for identifying structural components of a mechanism, showing how the components interact to generate an outcome by triggering what is considered to be a key mechanism, and the conditions (or contextual mechanisms) that influence the outcome. Bygstad & Munkvold claim that the mechanism approach is able to 'combine theoretical perspectives, documented mechanisms and empirical evidence' in its bid to causally explain phenomenon (Ibid.). Easton (2010), following the Critical Realist approach of Andrew Sayer, developed a general framework similar though to Bygstad & Munkvold's. He applied it in the case study analysis of the development of a buyer–seller relationship after the installation of a new Management Information System (MIS) in a firm. Bygstad & Munkvold applied their framework to uncover mechanisms in Information systems research in a longitudinal case research of a Norwegian airliner. They tried to understand and explain the relationship between IT capabilities and business innovation. They have since reviewed their steps adding the concept of affordance to identify subsets of complex mechanisms in Bygstad *et al.* (2016). Danermark *et al.* (2002) suggested a general framework for CR data analysis while Bhaskar and Danermark (2006) discussed the application of a CR framework to disability research. Since 'capacities for behaviour called mechanisms' (Easton 2010) are also what we seek to identify in this thesis in order to answer the research questions, an integration of ideas from these existing CR frameworks for data analysis can be adapted and used to identify the HR mechanisms which explain how HRPs (for our study, TD and RB) or a SHRP drawn by agents in relationships in an organization could cause (if at all) increased OFP.

Another CR - based approach applied in a few empirical research, is Archer's morphogenetic-morphostatic (M-M) approach. Horrocks (2009) used the morphogenetic approach to attempt to capture the interplay of objects (structure and agency) and how they shape and reshape one another over time. Thursfield and Hamblett (2005) proposed a realist framework applying Archer's morphogenetic approach to explore the nature and development of HRM using the case of the experience of an organisation. They argue that 'the inconsistencies and contradictions that characterise HRM are best understood through a stratified, realist ontology' and tried to demonstrate the efficacy of the morphogenetic model as a means to interpret the theory and practice of HRM. Thus the morphogenetic approach provides empirical researchers the means to operationalize Archer's analytical dualism<sup>21</sup> via the three stages of emergence-interplay-outcome (Ibid.). Related frameworks and methodologies for data analysis exist, some of which, though very popular among social scientists, have not been framed from a Critical Realist perspective. Next, I review the popular one.

#### **4.3.2. Grounded Theory and its relevance**

One of the most popular methodologies used by social science researchers for investigating human behaviour, among other social processes, is the Grounded Theory (GT) by Glaser and Strauss. It is nevertheless criticized for having as its base an empiricist ontology which tends to reduce reality to the empirically observable

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<sup>21</sup> Archer argued against one aspect of Giddens's structuration theory, namely the conflating of the relating phenomena of agency and structure, arguing that the two should be analysed separately without giving primacy to any though we recognise their interdependence. By suggesting a three phase period of structural/cultural conditioning, societal agency interactions, and structural/cultural elaboration, she argues that the two can be analytically disentangled and proposed her M-M approach.

while pushing theories about structures into the background via superficial empirical categorizations and the testing of empirical conjectures (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). Criticisms against it notwithstanding, GT has evolved over the years to become 'the most widely used qualitative interpretive framework in the social sciences' and 'currently the most comprehensive qualitative research methodology available' (Kempster and Parry 2011; Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p53; cf. Denzin and Lincoln 1995: p508; Haig 1995).

'Data' in GT could mean incidents or events or social interaction even though it is recognised that sometimes there are data not interpretable to any of these (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p60-1). After data is collected, GT employs what is called a constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1998: p273) - 'an amalgam of systematic coding, data analysis and theoretical sampling procedures which enables the researcher to make interpretive sense of much of the diverse patterning in the data by developing theoretical ideas at a higher level of abstraction than the initial data descriptions' (Haig 1995; Moghaddam 2006).

Coding is the analytic process through which the researcher-analyst finds the core issues in the data, conceptualises the issues, recognises those concepts, develops and relates them (Ibid.). In the process categories are formed from the data. Categories are terms used to speak about a part of our empirical data or a group of concepts or an activity we have already imagined. GT operates on empirical data by starting out from induction though not usually ending with it (Charmaz 2012). Addressing a medical sociologists' conference, Charmaz argued that GT 'offers explicit analytic guidelines, ways of seeing data, control over the research process, and the promise of completed projects' (Charmaz 2012).

From its symbolic interactionism roots, GT is well suited to address cases investigating how symbols in the world shape human behaviour (Aldiabat and Le Navenec 2011; Corbin and Strauss 2008). For example, HR practices, corporate HR strategies, organisational climate and culture, to name a few, can be viewed as symbols in the employees' world whose meaning they have to interpret and construct, which eventually will influence their behaviour. Also, the shared meanings employees make of the actions of corporate agents (in this case the employer who uses TD and RB practices) influences the kind of behavioural responses employees make or how they change their actions thereby reproducing and transforming the workplace and transforming themselves.

As far as compatibility with CR goes, GT can be joined to CR because 'it can operate across the traditional epistemological paradigms spanned by CR' since it embraces epistemic relativism, is amenable to conceptualisation and reconceptualization due to its belief in fallibilism, and its users can adopt the explanatory abductive and retroductive inference modes, all of which are requirements of the CR paradigm (Ibid., Kempster and Parry 2011; Haig 1995; Partington 1998). It will, because of its empiricist orientation, benefit from the ontological depth of an explanatory framework like the CR-based frameworks.

Phenomenology and Ethnography are not as suitable as GT. Phenomenology is most used when the purpose of the research is to describe phenomena (Dowling and Cooney 2012; cf. Koch 1995; and Spiegelberg 1970) or, to describe how agents experience phenomena (Ibid.; cf. Rapport *et al.* 2005; Cohen *et al.* 2000). It is not suitable for explanation in resolving causality where the factors contributory to a phenomenon are explored. Phenomenology's advocacy for stringency and rigour

may sacrifice flexibility – one of the methodological requirements of CR. Ethnography is useful “when social conditions, attitudes, roles and interpersonal relationships are explored *‘in conjunction with fundamental cultural prescriptions’*” (Ibid.) It is concerned with the development of descriptive theory which reflects cultural knowledge, behaviours or meanings (Ibid.; cf. Omery 1988: p29).

What genre of GT can we consider then? Dowling and Cooney (2012) considered the criteria for determining whether to adopt a Glaserian or Straussian approach for their study to include: 1). General user friendliness for data analysis; 2). Potential to generate theory; and 3). Compatibility with contemporary thinking. There have been arguments about which GT version satisfies the three criteria best, especially on the question about which version has evolved with contemporary thinking. Though I reject relativist ontology, I may be inclined to Charmatz’s interpretative or constructivist genre of GT since my data type is event - centred and not narrative-based and because the Straussian GT from which it evolved allows that the purpose of GT must not be to develop theory which classical GT insists on (Ibid.). I might as well be inclined to classical GT being that it accepts a realist ontology though I deny its insistence on absolute truth (see Devadas *et al.* 2011). So it is pros here and cons there for each genre of GT. Devadas and colleagues proposed a model or/and framework which could guide researchers on how to ‘integrate the pros and cons as well as arguments and counter arguments of a particular methodology’, whether Glaserian/classical or Straussian GT for researchers in human resource development (HRD) (Ibid.). Along this integrative perspective, I have chosen elements of classical GT for its realist ontology base and for not over-conceptualising data and because it leaves one with the possibility of developing middle-range

theory but also adopt Strauss's relative truth stance. This is closer to Charmaz's genre of GT.

In the next sub-section, in view of the above GT features, I explore the possibility of grafting the elements of GT to existing CR data analysis frameworks. First, I compare and contrast the GT approach to data analysis with existing CR data analysis frameworks exploring if and how the CR framework mirrors GT.

#### **4.3.3 Comparing GT data analysis approach to CR frameworks**

There are distinct similarities and differences between GT's method and CR frameworks for data analysis. In terms of similarities, both approaches:

i) Are interpretative and reflexive schemes suitable for intensive research, suitable for analysing qualitative data?

ii) Are systematic yet flexible in their methods unlike the often rigid positivist data analytic approaches. For instance, CR researchers exercise some freedom in their selection of inference models used in data analysis. A Critical Realist-inspired research methodology 'combines different methods of investigation to good effect' and allows the development of novel ways of opening out a field for study 'in ways not previously envisaged' (Ackroyd and Fleetwood 2005b). CR data analysis frameworks are flexible to go from induction/deduction to abduction/retroduction. Charmaz claims that GT researchers could start with induction but veer into other inference modes as researcher's creativity demands (Charmaz 2012).

iii) Deny the positivist approach's insistence on searching for absolute truth. This is the reason I chose Glaser's genre of GT. He advocates a relative and interpretative

epistemology. Both approaches can be used to construct middle-range and formal theory.

iv) Have the weakness of being tedious even though GT's approach has evolved into a form of 'heuristic device' for data analysis, despite researcher's headache in deciding when to declare 'theoretical saturation' and stop data trip.

v) Allow for some sort of epistemological closure (or theoretical saturation) to be reached while permitting data collection-data analysis cycles (data trips). GT's theoretical sampling strategy elicits further data collection till the properties of a category are saturated.

vi) Allow for researcher theoretical sensitivity, i.e. allow some form of 'coupling of data' to theory even though variants of GT give little place for prior theory (or even literature review and prior concepts) to 'force data' or influence analysis (See Glaser 1998, 2005, 2009).

As for distinct differences:

i) GT data analysis framework is not based strictly on the metatheoretical assumptions of CR and so does not privilege ontology as does CR frameworks. For instance, GT's approach does not reach down to the deep structures in the empirical material but is criticised as focusing on the 'empirically-accessible' surface of events using inductive inferences to generalise to theory (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p72-3; cf. Chomsky 1965). CR perspective by its flexibility could be conceived as a GT grounded in mechanisms of phenomenon, after all Haig (1995) had argued in his reconstruction of GT that GT is grounded in phenomena not data. Bunge (1967) and

Whitehead (1929) had argued that 'it is never possible to distil theories of deep structures from data'. Against such argument, CR frameworks (See, e.g. Easton 2010; Danermark *et al.* 2002: p109-10) start from data, sometimes initiating induction/deduction inferences, but later go beyond the level of events to retroduce to the structures in the real domain in search of explanatory mechanisms.

ii) Though GT like CR goes against positivist constant conjunction of events, it favours a constant comparison of events embedded in empirical data. CR mechanism approach could be viewed as a constant comparison of mechanisms going by its assumption of a differentiated and stratified world or a layered ontology. This point derives from the one above.

iii) GT has its roots in symbolic interactionism (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). CR could be viewed as based on what I refer to as 'structural interactionism'. Included among the features of symbolic interactionism are pragmatism, exploration, and social action (Ibid.).

The congruency between the GT and CR frameworks for data analysis emerges from the above comparison and should not be ignored. It seems plausible to now take advantage of the strengths of GT in designing a CR framework for data analysis. I therefore make a case for what I have called 'an extended CR framework' for analysing the data for this thesis.

#### **4.3.4 Case for an extended Critical Realist Framework<sup>22</sup> for data analysis**

Earlier in this chapter, I observed that there have been concerns that CR has had limited influence in empirical research due to its lack of an explicit methodology

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<sup>22</sup> This extended framework may pass for a Critical Realist GT data analysis framework.

(Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; Oliver 2011), and the inaccessible language of many of its texts (Oliver 2011; cf. Pratt 1995). Oliver, noting that CR has not moved beyond 'general guidelines like using mixed methodology, conceptualisation, and the retroductive technique', explored 'the potential for GT to be adapted for use within a CR paradigm' suggesting that CR's lack of connection to what she termed 'a familiar research methodology' may be limiting its application. In contrast, she continued, GT has wide usage especially within the social sciences whether with qualitative or quantitative or mixed methods and is a well-described methodology (Ibid.). GT approaches have evolved faster than CR-based data analysis frameworks going by when their base methodologies were espoused to us - 1967 and 1975 respectively. In short, 'GT can provide CR's method' (Ibid.: p371). It has been observed that GT has evolved from a strictly 'empirically oriented method' towards a more interpretative and pragmatic constructivist (flexible) approach to data analysis and is still evolving to variants called 'entirely new grounded theory' or 'un-grounded theory' (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009: p76).

To meet the needs of CR inquiry, some concerns raised about GT's weaknesses are being addressed. GT methodology's insistence on close coupling to data; insistence on objectivity against subjectivity (For classical or traditional GT, 'reason and logic' should not be augmented by 'emotion and feeling' Kempster and Parry (2011) contended.); and its empiricism, individualism, and focus on induction (Oliver 2011) are gradually being resolved, and relaxed in some cases. Interestingly, the evolution and diffusion, has led to constructivist and critical researchers like Kathlyn Charmaz, adapting GT for their research (Ibid.).

The originators of GT saw it as a mode of analysis from the beginning (Strauss and Corbin 1990: p276). The outcome of the comparison of GT and CR-based frameworks above points us to the possibility of grafting the main features of GT into a CR data analysis framework. This is consistent with Oliver's observation that 'CR and GT can become highly compatible, sharing a focus on abduction, and a commitment to fallibilism and the interconnectedness of practice and theory....both of them can attend to evidence and meaning, individual agency and structure, theory-building and the pursuit of emancipatory goals' (Oliver 2011). On close examination, CR-based mechanism approaches can be viewed as a form of CR - based GT data analysis framework.

I build on former Critical Realist methodological contributions (Sayer 1992; Danermark *et al.* 2002; Sayer 2002; Easton 2010; Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; Bhaskar and Danermark 2006; Bhaskar *et al.* 2010; Bygstad *et al.* 2016) by extending their frameworks and contributions while adding core elements of original GT. The extended framework proposed here can then be referred to as a Critical Realist GT data analysis except that it is grounded, like Haig insists on phenomenon, not empirical data (Haig 1995). I show in the next section how the extended framework can be operationalised.

Has any researcher done this kind of framework extension before (as if antecedents really matter), one may ask? Glaser and Strauss (1967) foresaw the possibility of GT becoming useful to other modes of analysis when they used the word 'fitness' as an important feature of GT and hinted at their applicability to everyday realities. Because of space constraints, I will briefly discuss four recent

attempts at synthesising different approaches and frameworks for data analysis - grafting GT to CR.

Oliver (2011) has argued for how joining GT with existing CR perspective may better serve social work research's ethical, emancipatory, and functional goals. Kempster and Parry (2011) had demonstrated how revising their earlier empirical research and joining CR to their GT-based empirical research may provide better explanation of leadership learning especially in contextual settings. They specifically advocate the use of Critical Realist-informed GT to help develop the 'understanding of how context and process shape the manifestation of leadership' arguing and subsequently demonstrating that though GT has traditionally been a method for researching observable phenomena, it can also be 'used to research non-observable phenomena like leadership' (Ibid.: p107). For them, social science researchers can use CR to 'maximise the explanatory potential of the GT method' (Ibid.: p113). Frederic Lee proposed 'an approach to theory creation and evaluation for heterodox economics' based on the integration of Critical Realist and GT methods. In his proposal, the concepts of structures and causal mechanisms espoused by CR formed what he termed 'the outline of theory construction', while GT provided 'the research strategy to transform them into a theory' (Lee 2012). Belfrage and Hauf (2015) and Belfrage and Hauf (2017) used what they called Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) taking advantages of the capacity of GT to produce rich conceptual frameworks while avoiding its weaknesses. To render GT useful to cultural political economy (CPE), they 'redesigned' GT 'so as to take theories of capitalism at higher levels of abstraction into account when approaching the complex concrete in ethnographic research and to enable the move back to higher levels of abstraction when analysing

the generated data' (Belfrage and Hauf 2015). This required adapting 'the methods and techniques of data generation and analysis derived from grounded theory' (Ibid.: p330). By employing 'abstract pre-concepts' e.g. 'the middle-range concepts proposed by CPE, as guides, or soft hypotheses', they used CGT through ethnographic research to 'generate empirically grounded accounts of the everyday and put these into dialogue with existing theory in order to deepen, broaden and refine theoretical knowledge, challenge existing explanations, or find new connections' (Ibid.: p336-7). So, instead of attempting to discover 'grounded theory', they 'elaborate existing theory' (Belfrage and Hauf 2015; cf. Burawoy 1998: p16). Their CGT suggests the possibility of overcoming the tendency within organisation and management' studies 'to focus on either agency or structure and instead facilitate the study of the interdependencies between the two' (Ibid.: p331). From the foregoing, Bygstad and Munkvold and Belfrage and Hauf clearly support allowing existing theory (through the theoretical framework) to guide CR or Critical-GT data analysis and CGT is amenable to modifying existing theories post-data analysis (See Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b: p5; Belfrage and Hauf 2017; 2015).

#### *The role of pre-existing theory in the extended framework*

The extended framework should be open to using pre-existing theories as a starting point for Critical Realist empirical research based on grounded theoretic methods notwithstanding that there is a debate about its appropriateness. Four scholarly works - Belfrage and Hauf (2015); Oliver (2011); Fletcher (2016); and Bhaskar (1978) - take positions on the debate about the appropriateness or not of using theoretical frameworks (or pre-existing theory) as starting point for CR-GT research and having

it guide data analysis. Even though some Critical Realists have employed a grounded theory approach to data coding and analysis (e.g. Maxwell 2012; Oliver 2011; Yeung 1997), others (see Fletcher 2016) give several reasons why grounded theory is not ideal for a CR study. According to Fletcher, the two approaches engage with existing theory in very different ways (Ibid.). Although grounded theory can be generally guided by existing theory or literature (i.e., substantive theory) on a topic (Glaser and Strauss 1967), it avoids active engagement with existing theory during the analysis process. Oliver on the other hand supported her argument by outlining requirements which GT should meet (and which she claims it meets) to qualify as a CR methodology as follows: its shifts from pure induction to abduction tending towards retroduction; its dual focus on agency and structure; its embrace of epistemic relativism and mixed methods; its embrace of the doctrine of fallibilism; and its adaptation to different theoretical perspectives (Oliver 2011: p384). Bhaskar (1979) justified the use of existing theory in CR research seeing it as a starting point for empirical research: 'Once a hypothesis about a generative structure has been produced in social science it can be tested quite empirically, although not necessarily quantitatively' (p62). Since pre-existing theories may not necessarily reflect reality accurately, and since some theories may be more correct than others, the researcher must, 'avoid any commitment to the content of specific theories and recognise the conditional nature of all its results' (Ibid.: p6).

*GT coding as necessary feature to be integrated with CR data analysis*

The data created by this research is mostly reported rather than observed (as is with most social science research methods: see Easton 2010: p120). Descriptions

of events that occur within the HRM-P phenomenon are mixed – mostly experienced and reported and little of observed. In other words, these are internal events, i.e. events occurring within the key entities/objects – employees, employer organisations, and client organisations. Easton contends that a CR case approach is less well suited to the study of individual behavior or situations characterized as perceptions and attributes tracking (Ibid.) It is, he contends, well suited to relatively clearly bounded, but complex phenomena such as organisations, inter-organisational relationships, etc. Going by these contentions, a standalone CR case approach may be less suited to studying a HRM-P phenomenon. I argue that a GT coding analysis is better suited to studying the internal events in the objects, e.g. the perceptions and experiences of employees, the internal organisational events in the employee organisation or in the minds of her agents or those of clients. Yet, the CR data analysis will best suit the study of the interactional events between the relating objects. GT coding explores internal individual phenomena, perceptions and experiences of human agents in the social structures, their positions and practices as reported by them for the most part.

The challenge we often have during data analysis is to identify important issues and events and thereafter extract key objects from the events (key points) so we can form concepts of them. Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) for example, were not explicit on why they chose events from data and not line by line segments or themes. They were also not explicit on the criteria for identifying key objects. But this much they said: “...entities may emerge from data, *in a grounded way* (see Volkoff *et al.* 2007) or they may be embedded in a theoretical framework” (p5) [emphasis mine].

From reviewing the handling of this step in CR data analysis by Easton (2010) and Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b), I am of the view that narrow description of what constitutes events in the existing CR frameworks, with their focus on handling research questions that ask only the 'why' questions, seriously handicaps the frameworks as they do not accommodate other question types. In reviewing the initial empirical data collected in this study, I discovered that practically, empirical data do not always present space-time-dimensioned events, that is, in the chronological order we have come to know, i.e. in a historic sense. I propose therefore that empirical researchers distinguish forms of events which may be seen in different kinds of empirical data (data scenarios). I decided therefore to distinguish historic events, usually perceived in the empirical domain, which are the most common available forms, from perceived events, and normative or expected events. In the identification of key objects, the data analyst should re-assess the events (event analysis) and *attempt to extract the key objects from them* taking note of their causal powers and liabilities. The entity or object associated with the event is the observed object as captured by the empirical data. The key components are the real objects of the case, e.g. persons, organisations, contracts, systems, etc. and how they interact. These objects constitute structures.

In the data analysis carried out in this research, I ask: Which objects were these events associated with? When abstracting, I conceptualize an object different from the raw specific object captured in the empirical data. The epistemological activity is to move in thought from the object-concrete to the object-abstract. From the foregoing and armed with the knowledge of these frontrunners, I hope I have

made a case for an extended CR framework for data analysis. Next, I show how such extended framework may be operationalised.

#### **4.4 Operationalising the extended Critical Realist Framework**

This section draws heavily from the ideas of especially Danermark et al 2002, then Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b), Easton (2010), and Bygstad *et al.* (2016), proposing an extended framework which synthesizes features of the original GT data analysis technique and the features of existing CR data analysis frameworks (see similar efforts by Belfrage and Hauf 2015) including an important third feature - the validation of identified mechanisms through the framing of the data analysis using the integrated theoretical framework and the identification of affordances as subsets of complex mechanisms (this third feature is discussed in steps 5 and 8 respectively below). Eight steps are described below for the extended framework.

##### **4.4.1 Eight steps of the framework**

###### **Step 1: Coding for concepts and categories**

GT data analysis moves 'from the empirical data to codes and themes, and to a hierarchy of levels of abstraction' with such abstraction necessitating interpretation 'beyond surface-level data' which might mean utilising metaphors (Lewis 1996), related concepts, and even unrelated theories as supplements to data interpretation assisting in the 'emergence of an explanatory substantive theory' (Oliver 2011). In other words, codes, concepts, and categories are derived as a way of isolating some objects and focusing on some objects of interest for a research. Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b cf. Volkoff *et al.* (2007) suggested that entities (objects) can emerge in a

grounded way. With GT, the researcher can identify key objects and explore their existence and relevance (causal powers and liabilities) by focusing on what I have called 'issues of ontological importance'. For CR purposes, I allow the CR meta-theoretical concepts e.g. powers and tendencies, structure and agency guide the analysis. Some may wish to call this 'critical coding'. By exploring the relationships between the core categories (key objects) including their causal powers, the conditions, and the effects/outcome, the analyst can develop an initial map of the social structures in the system.

#### Step 2: Description of concrete events

Here, starting with concrete events, we use every day concepts to describe the 'complex and composite event or situation' we wish to study. An important part of this involves interpreting the agents in the event and the interview respondents noting the way they describe their experiences and situations (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p109-10) similar in this sense to GT data analysis which aids the generation of credible descriptions and sense-making of peoples' actions and words (Kempster and Parry 2011).

#### Step 3: 'Analytical resolution': Dissolve the composite and complex and focus on key components through abstraction

This involves the dissolution of the composite and complex events into 'various components, aspects, or dimensions' and then confining oneself to studying certain components while neglecting others (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p109-10). By breaking the events into their components, one can note people's/agent's actions and interactions, meanings people give to the events, and any norms, extreme cases,

and repairs; one can also underline the causes of social order or instability. In the social sciences, we have to do a thought experiment – **a conceptual abstraction**. Abstraction should primarily aim at determining the necessary and constitutive properties in different objects, thus determining the nature of the object (Ibid.: p43). The abstractions must, however, at any given point in time, ‘separate the object’s necessary properties from the contingent ones and show what it is in the object that makes it what it is and not something else’ (Ibid.: p44). We would ‘need several different theoretical abstractions in order to explain a certain concrete phenomenon; we may also need theoretical abstractions at several different levels’ (Ibid.: p49). In abstract analysis, the analyst starts at the concrete to the abstract. To abstract is to ‘isolate a particular aspect, a set of internally defined social relations, a particular structure’ (Ibid.: p43). The structure or the social relations are what make the phenomenon to exist. One form of abstraction is the abstract **structural analysis**. In this thesis, we can abstract the aspects of HRM-P of interest and relevance to the research questions and view the interesting ones(s) as ‘Individual concrete phenomenon’. Further abstract analysis will entail employing abductive inference to components of a concrete event.

#### Step 4: Abduction and theoretical re-description of the case

Having selected a concrete event from the data, we will find the relationship between the individual concrete phenomenon and the general structures in the context of known theories, ideas, and conceptual frameworks (Ibid.). The original ideas of the objects of study are developed when we place them in ‘new contexts of

ideas' (Ibid.). The idea is to compare and possibly integrate one with another the 'several different theoretical interpretations and explanations (Ibid.).'

#### Step 5: Causal Analysis – Retroduction and the validation of identified mechanisms

While abstraction via structural analysis enables us to know what makes the phenomenon exist – its structures, the causal analysis enables us to explain the cause – why something has happened – the mechanisms behind the event (Ibid.: p70). Here the analyst imagines the 'fundamental conditions or circumstances' that could make the individual concrete phenomenon possible, and then relates the empirical fact of data to the internal relations and properties in the structures with a view to identifying the candidate mechanisms that could cause the event(s). Helpful questions to ask could be: What condition or circumstance must be there for a SHRP to result in OFP?; What thing or condition, if not present, could make a case not to be possible (counterfactual reasoning). Comparison of cases, counterfactual thinking, studying (normal) cases, studying extreme (abnormal) cases, and social and thought experimenting are strategies which can facilitate the employment of retroductive inferencing in social science research (Ibid., Meyer and Lunnay 2013). An elaboration and comparison of the relative explanatory powers of the candidate mechanisms identified are carried out (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p109-10).

Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) advised that data collection and analysis should be repeated until closure is reached before identifying a 'key mechanism'- that is, the mechanism with the strongest explanation power related to the empirical data. We must also endeavour to specify the contextual mechanisms that aid or counteract the key mechanism(s). It is important to note the levels where the key

mechanisms lie in the strata and which mechanisms emergently contribute to the stratum above them.

The extended framework for data analysis may have made the identification of mechanisms a bit *more explicit*, but there is still room for improvement (but one could ask: how much more is enough?). In my opinion, another analyst, using the same data, may not arrive at the mechanisms identified here as being the salient ones. I therefore propose adding an important sub-step under retroduction, to further substantiate the GT-CR data analysis and make more explicit (less ambiguous and replicable) the identification of mechanisms. Bygstad *et al.* (2016) suggested that leveraging on CR's flexibility, a 'Triangulation' of methods could be done where a variety of approaches are used to identify causal relationships, 'to explore the diversity of underlying structures and to control for bias' (p86). What I have termed 'a data-analytic triangulation' involves a three-part template: 'identify key and contextual mechanisms by retroducting to structures – using the same data, substantiate/validate these identified mechanisms through identifying micro-mechanisms (Bygstad refers to them as 'affordances') – validate again the mechanisms by theoretical framing'. Future research direction could be to add to the middle part of the triad - '....substantiate/validate these identified mechanisms through identifying affordances' – as a suggested sub-step. The sub-step and the resulting data - analytic triangulation could feed into the validation of the data analysis process.

Bygstad *et al.* (2016) drawing from the concept of 'affordance' identified affordances defined generally as 'action possibilities' or 'creating the potential for

action'. The affordances emerge from the interaction between a human actor and his/her environment (Ibid.). The identified affordances are viewed as mechanisms occurring at lower levels and are associated with more concrete outcomes. They are viewed also as subsets (and could thus be termed micro-mechanisms) of more complex mechanisms which occur at higher levels and which are associated with less concrete outcomes. Bygstad and colleagues used the affordance concept in a Critical Realist data analysis where they tried to identify the mechanisms that could explain how the use of information technology may have resulted in innovation in an airline. I must point out here that Bygstad and colleagues saw their objective as trying to identify only the mechanisms connected to technology and so used affordance to represent the mechanisms that explain the role of technology. They treated all 'associated social mechanisms' as background (as arising from 'non-technical organisational structures') rather than as the focus of the explanation (Ibid.: p92). That is why they analysed the enabling/constraining, stimulating or releasing conditions as background or context. Thus the analyst could in adapting the identification of affordances to HRM-P research, instead of basing the analysis on 'techno-organisational context', base it on the superstructure 'PINES and the organisational context', replacing the objects of technology with HRPs and see both the emerging affordances and the contextual conditions (enabling/constraining, releasing, and stimulating conditions) which could be social, socio-economic, socio-psychological, technical, and other types of mechanisms, as important in so far as they are micro-mechanisms in the validation and substantiation of the complex mechanisms.

#### Step 6: Causal explanation - 'Concretization'<sup>23</sup> and contextualization'

In this step, we are back to concrete from the abstract by 'examining how different structures and mechanisms manifest themselves in concrete situations', that is, we study the interplay of mechanisms at different levels, under specific conditions. The aim of these studies is to 'interpret the meanings of these mechanisms' in different contexts and to contribute in explaining 'concrete events and processes' being careful to distinguish between 'the more structural conditions and the accidental circumstances' (Ibid.). In explaining how the identified mechanisms explain the phenomenon being investigated and what conditions would prevail for the phenomenon to occur, we have to compare and contrast with other competing explanations. Critical Realists believe that no one explanation is absolute truth.

#### Step 7: Propose a modified form of existing theory or a new theory

Substantive theory is 'a set of propositions designed to establish an explanation of a phenomenon in a particular context' (Oliver 2011). Under CR conventions, we need to clarify the theoretical nature of the objects/entities involved, the ways in which they act and the nature and variety of mechanisms through which they exert their powers or are acted upon by other entities (Easton 2010: p128). Using GT analysis, the substantive theories can be statements that relate the derived categories with the aim of explaining a phenomenon. By relating the individual concrete phenomena to the general structures, the analyst is able to compare the knowledge from CR and that from GT and possibly synthesise them.

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<sup>23</sup> Danermark *et al.* (2002: p109) highlighted that 'abstraction and concretization provide two different types of knowledge of reality' none of them irreducible to the other.

#### Step 8: Framing the analysis and answering the research question

This step straddles the rest 7 steps and informs data analysis and interpretation. Following Belfrage and Hauf (2015: p330), I adapt GT's methods and techniques of data analysis. By allowing the integrated theoretical framework to frame the data analysis' steps, coupled with the conjectures, I 'generate empirically grounded accounts of the experiences of the respondents putting these into dialogue with existing theory in order to deepen' or even modify it (Ibid.: p336-7), always remaining open to discovering 'new grounded theory' or a modification or elaboration of the existing theory (see Ibid. ; cf. Burawoy 1998: p16). Using the integrated theoretical framework to frame a data analysis increases the researcher's theoretical sensitivity enabling him/her to have an in-depth understanding of the events in the case (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b: p6). Also, I align with Belfrage and Hauf (2015's) views that the theoretical framework makes possible the study of the interdependencies between structure and agency as opposed to focusing on either agency or structure as most organisation and management studies do.

#### 4.5 Summary

The process for CR data analysis is hinged on its ontology-based methodology with its focus on the identification of mechanisms which connect cause to the phenomena we study, and on an epistemic relativity of truth using analytical tools such as conceptual abstraction and retroduction. An extended CR framework for data analysis has been operationalised by describing its steps. It makes more explicit

the steps in existing CR frameworks for data analysis and takes advantage of the flexibility of the CR paradigm by drawing from the core elements of classical GT data analysis techniques, and validating the data analytic process using the idea of affordance and the theoretical framing of the analysis. For clarity, the data analysis done under the extended framework is termed a CR grounded theoretic data analysis because CR methodology drives the investigation, driving Charmaz's genre of Grounded theoretic analysis. With so much said about process description, next, I apply the extended framework to analyse the data collected for this thesis in chapter 5.

## Chapter 5

### Implementing the Critical Realist Data Analysis

‘When we lay bare the generative mechanisms at the social level, we thereby also explain social phenomena in terms of social causes. These are produced by people and can thus be changed by people.’ (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p201).

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I implement the extended framework for CR data analysis described in chapter 4 using data collected from three companies in the petroleum industry in Nigeria - a main case company ‘Wells’, and two other case companies - ‘B’ and ‘S’<sup>24</sup>. How do I justify the use of more than one case in this research? For a HRM-P phenomenon, a ‘heterogeneity’ of events possibly caused by ‘a large number of powerful and active contingent relations’ might occur with the consequence that working through the particular ways in which the relations operate in a single case situation may not be as rewarding as using multi-case situation (Easton 2010: p127).

‘Wells’, ‘B’, and ‘S’ are indigenous small oil service-focused Companies with offices in Nigeria. ‘S’ is a start-up. Their main service offering is providing oil well services for petroleum exploration and producing companies in Nigeria and overseas. The overarching goal of their managements is to manage their human resources to achieve sustained service quality and by extension improved OFP and to earn retainership by clients. They do this by implementing TD objectives within budget constraints and by trying to close the wage gap between their RB packages and those of competitor companies, especially the multinational companies.

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<sup>24</sup> Data from these companies have been so labeled to maintain their confidentiality.

The data from 'S' and 'B' have been used to 'substantiate'<sup>25</sup> data from 'Wells' (mainly for comparison) even though the Wells' case data remains the main focus data because it is more comprehensive and tracks the research design. Further, the researcher's experiences have been collated in Appendix G as researcher's mental model. These experiences are included as data and used to interrogate, interpret, and substantiate empirical data. Substantiation is a comparison of related cases which manifest the same social structure being investigated in order to validate some of the products of data analysis. In all three cases, respondents selected for interviews covered the whole rung of the organisation's staff structure.

The research questions (theoretical format) I intend to answer using this data analysis are:

- A) Does a SHRP combining with governance structures and other mediating mechanisms causally influence productivity (PR), employee turnover (TO), and OFP through instigating employees' productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours and other stakeholders' behaviours?, and
- B) If it does, what mechanisms, and other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP?

I forewarn a danger of readers expecting the usual flow of qualitative data analysis reporting where the analyst follows a 'tell-show data-tell' process or what some may call a 'show and tell' process. As described in chapter 4, there are steps of an extended data analysis framework which I have to report in this thesis. To a large

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<sup>25</sup> Allan (2003) used the word 'substantiate' in his article involving analyses of multiple case data, to mean compare and validate concepts and categories emerging from a previous case.

extent, this chapter will follow the steps in reporting data analysis but the discussion of the findings have been left in chapter 6 for flow of the narrative.

The rest of the chapter is organised as follows: In section 5.2, steps 1 to 4 of the extended framework are covered. This involves GT coding until categories emerge, describing salient concrete events, identifying the key objects, and then abducting and theoretically re-describing the case. The focus is on conceptualizing the phenomenon of interest by abstracting from data. In section 5.3, the focus is on conceptualizing a 'different kind of thing' – mechanisms and structures, which I attempt to identify by employing retroduction. This involves carrying out Sayer's structural analysis in order to identify the social structures, doing a causal analysis to try to identify the candidate mechanisms. In order to track the steps of the extended framework, I have kept some steps which could have formed part of the discussion chapter in this chapter, such as step 5. I have moved the causal explanation through 'concretization and contextualization' which is step 6 of the extended framework to the discussion chapter. Also, the step #7 - the proposition of a theory modification - has been moved to chapter 7 in order to maintain the flow of the narrative. In section 5.4, I cover step 8 of the extended framework, using the integrated theoretical framework to theoretically frame the data analysis and report the results and findings of the data analysis in section 5.5. In the course of the analysis, I returned to the field for more data and to share the findings with respondents. I report the feedback from such a return-data trip in section 5.6 and summarise the chapter in section 5.7.

## **5.2 Steps 1 to 4 of the extended framework**

In analyzing the data collected, I follow the steps of the extended CR framework developed in chapter 4 above.

### 5.2.1 Coding for Concepts and Categories (step 1)

Having transcribed verbatim the data collected, I GT-code the data looking for patterns that reflect/agree with the theoretical framework and the conjectures. The GT coding process runs like this: An 'issue of importance or interest to the research' is highlighted by the informant or interviewee in words and phrases; noted by the researcher; described by the researcher in a short phrase or label; with the issue, may be, mentioned again in the same or similar words; again noted (Ibid.). The short descriptor phrase researchers construct is called a *code* (Ibid.; Charmaz 2012: p5). Coding reflects the researcher's initial interpretation of the data - 'what strikes you as happening in the data' (Ibid.: p6). As we code, we make multiple passes of the transcribed interview (or data) and write comments and descriptions GT refers to as 'memos' upon returning from the field. Excerpt taken from the data with memo is shown below. See Appendix C for more excerpts.

Question: Does training and development practices affect you as a worker? If yes how does it really affect you as a worker, if no, why not?

Panel respondent 1: TD affects not only the skill set and competency of the worker but affects the development of the worker and thereby the financial base of the company. Using HSE as an example, not just increasing financial base but training reduces additional cost that may have incurred due to unsafe act due to lack of competence.

Panel respondent 2: From the angle of building competence in personnel, if no competence as a field engineer you may not complete task on time to save cost or you may make mistakes that would

increase cost-so training the employee helps develop employee. Relevant training helps develop the employee and hence the organisation.

Memo: Data showing that 'TD creates 'skills and knowledge' which are part of the 'competences' that can be further 'developed' leading to 'zero lost time incidence (LTI)' then to 'reduction of costs' and then to improved company finances or 'OFP'.

Codes from the data above are: 'TD generates competences'; 'TD generates skills and knowledge'; 'Competences related to cost reduction' which are shown as codes 1, 2, and 3 respectively. See Appendix D for all the 87 codes preceded by data and memos.

By comparing codes to codes, codes that relate to a common theme are grouped together as 'higher order commonality' to form concepts (Allan 2003). Concept #13 which is 'HR function exerts power' emerges from grouping codes 31, 47, and 48 where:

Code 31 is 'Power of HR function'

Code 47 is 'HR function faces internal and external institutional pressures'

Code 48 is 'power-conflict between management commitment and HR function'

Below are excerpts from the list of concepts. I illustrate with concept #13 with its constituent codes and properties/remarks.

No:	Concepts	Constituent Codes	Remarks including properties
13	HR function exerts power	31,47,48	Researchers may need to consider the HR function as an 'independent stakeholder' in order to understand it. In that case, it is seen as wielding some powers, because it holds the resources the organization needs to survive. It is like 'Coercive isomorphism' in Institutional theory (see Jackson and Schuler 1995; cf. Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1977). The Management – HR function can be viewed as analogous to the Principal-Agent relationship and problem.

See Appendix E for the list of all the 23 concepts.

Further grouping and regrouping of these concepts to form a yet higher order commonality yields another label called *categories* (Allan 2003). Categories are seen as higher order concepts emerging after applying GT's constant comparison method on the concepts (Ibid.). After categorisation, possible properties of categories and their connectedness are outlined.

Example of categories:

No.	Categories	Constituent Concepts	Remarks including Properties
3	Multi-stakeholder effects	4	This characterises effects in the HRM-P system.
7	Ideological and Belief systems	6,17	Internal moderators for management and employees; Management Belief System biases management against investing in HRP and for poaching. Employee Value System moderates employee behaviours as responses to HRP and organisational behaviours. Originate from natures of employee and managers (i.e. from who they are)
9	Governance structures as mechanisms	8,18,19, 20, 21	Governance structure (e.g. employee contract) is seen as a tool or mechanism for transaction and adaptation. Contract for instance is characterised by incomplete information hence uncertainty unlike markets where there is complete information.

I show below how Concepts #6 and #17 are grouped for the Category #7 'Ideological and Belief systems' to emerge.

No:	Concepts	Constituent Codes	Remarks including properties
6	Employee value system (EVS) as determinant of employee motivation	18	EVS can be viewed as employee ideology.
17	Management Belief system (MBS) can conflict with HR function	49,78	MBS can be viewed as management's bias which sometimes conflicts with shareholders' (Principal's) positions and with HR function.

See Appendix F for the list of all the 11 categories. A close observation would reveal that the emergent categories can be grouped into the 6 headings: Source of motivation, Governance structure, Behaviours, Adaptation, Effects, and Context.

### 5.2.2 Description of concrete events (step 2)

I have isolated for analysis the following three major concrete events – the oil recession event of 2007 in Company Wells; the participant- observed events of 2014 involving the training and subsequent resignation of a young Field Engineer in company 'S'. I focus on these events because they are relevant to the research questions. I describe them below.

1) The first concrete event was reported by a respondent in the Company 'Wells'.

'In 2007 majority of our experienced hands left due to oil recession. Then I attended a HR training at Enugu. During the training I put up the question stating the experience we were having...and asked how do we handle it? We had to start reviewing our salary. We had to look for new incentives that can boost the monthly pay. We found out that when you train an employee to a particular level of experience that Training and experience must be matched with compensation or the monthly take home. If that experience is not matched with his monthly take home he leaves and goes to where he can get what he wants and that is exactly what we did. We had to review the entire salary, consolidate and give incentives to specific areas. The tension came down, the situation came to normalcy and that was how we brought the movement of staff down. It worked'.

2) The second concrete event is as recorded by the author being participant observer in Company 'S'.

'Between February and March 2014, a field Engineer who also held the Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Officer at Company 'S' was sent to attend a HSE training during which he stayed two weeks at the trainer's offices. Upon returning back to his desk after the two-week training, he looked elated and told his supervisors how transforming the courses were and how he feels motivated to contribute better to the HSE processes of the Company. He

averred that he was better equipped post- training to explain operational-HSE actions and volunteered to train others’.

3) The third concrete event is as recorded by the author being participant observer in Company ‘S’.

‘In April 2014, a young promising engineer in Company ‘S’ resigned his appointment. The engineer claimed during his exit interview that he wanted to leave to take a different challenge elsewhere. Incidentally, this was the same engineer involved in the March event (event #2) above. Exit Interviews conducted by this author on two staff on their way out indicated that they left due to feeling that RB was not good enough, believing they will have a better career somewhere else. I learnt from casually discussing with remaining trainees/other staff that most of the trainees were unhappy with their pay and this was the primary reason the young engineer resigned. Something needed to be done if Company ‘S’ was to retain remaining trainee engineers. With my position in the company, I thought it wise to review the salaries of all who had put in at least 12 months with the company even though field operations had not commenced as to generate revenue. Though the review did not mean substantial increases for the staff, I noticed that the pay increase got the trainee engineers some form of mood-lift. Not long after that, the company started a major field project, giving these young field engineers a start in their careers and also providing them extra income through field bonuses which when added to their basic salaries would motivate them to become committed to the company. Before this project, real field operations had not really swung off because the company was waiting to receive tools ordered from overseas. With the tools’ arrival, and with the project commencing, the mood of the staff – field engineers and other employees was further lifted’.

In the next step, I analyse the concrete events breaking them into key components through abstract analyses. I reiterate that most of the steps of the extended framework draw heavily from Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b.

No.	Key Real Object/Entity identified	Internal Attributes (structure/make-up/embodiment)	External Attributes (Interface, boundaries, modes of communication)
1	Employee	Skills and attitude for work; perceptual abilities; causal powers and liabilities: so can work; cognitive powers – utilitarian, decisive; psychological – can be emotional; personality traits & values; needy and expectant	Perceptive; socio-cultural networks; employee contract; other contracts (implicit-explicit)
2	Employer Organisation	Workforce, departments and units, systems and practices, strategy, etc.; service capabilities; can hire and pay for labour; investment capabilities; biases of agents; needy and expectant;	Supportive; perceptive through her agents (managers, supervisors, directors); communicates via the hierarchical structure through her agents; communication through employee and service contracts and other governance structures.
3	System of Human Resource practices	'Diverse elements' –forms of bodily and mental activities, and 'things' and their use, configured to give understandings and know-hows, 'states of emotion and motivational knowledge' (Reckwitz 2002: 249). These elements can be collected as e.g. Training and Development practices (TD) and Rewards and Benefits practices (RB). They are also embodiments of 'structures of aggregated power' (Hesketh and Fleetwood 2006, p687).	Stimulating; supportive; perceptible by human actors
4	Client organisation	Workforce, departments and units, strategy, etc.; can create service contracts; can hire and pay for labour and services; investment capabilities; needy and expectant.	Supportive; perceptive through her agents (Company representatives); communicates via the hierarchical structure through her agents; communication through the service contracts.

**Table 4:** Analysis of Identified key real objects

### 5.2.3 'Analytical resolution': Identify key components and real objects (step 3)

The real objects to focus on based on the concrete events above and rest of the data are the employee, the employer organisations and her management, the client organisation and her representatives, and the SHRP. The employer and employee are in internal relations while the organisation as a service contractor is internal relations with her Client. These key real objects focused on have been analysed in

Table 4 above specifying the important internal and external attributes that help us understand how they interplay with other objects to trigger the mechanisms that may generate the HR and organisational outcomes.

#### **5.2.4 Abduction and theoretical re-description of the case (step 4)**

All of the concrete events described and those in the data are analysed as fitting into an exchange pattern and seem to be aligned toward meeting the business strategy of the employer organization which includes rendering a quality cost-effective service to any client organization, attaining increased financial performance and making profit utilizing the employees as internal resource. Abstracting, I re-conceptualise the case as a complex exchange transaction within an organization, a socio-economic object. Theorising further, I conceptualize the case as a complex structure with human actors in interplay, with one of them (or an entity) initiating the exchange transaction by investing in a SHRP which in turn interacts with all the human actors, with the effects escalated at other levels within and beyond the initiating organization. The effects are then reinforced or thwarted through other exchange reciprocations, denials, etc. So, instead of conceptualizing a socio-economic object, a superstructure constituted of a host of structures is conceptualized as a basis for these events.

A social exchange relationship is kick-started or initiated when one party bestows a benefit, favour, or support to another (Coyle-Shapiro and Shore 2007). Which actor is in a better position to bear this initiation responsibility or what Gouldner (1960) called 'status duties', to provide the leading stimulus investment so

that the exchange can be initiated<sup>26</sup>, sustained, stabilized, and made profitable for all stakeholders? I assume that the powerful partner provides a stimulus investment<sup>27</sup> - a 'starting mechanism'- in this case through investing in a HRP in hope that the employee and the client reciprocate that effort later through human and contractual resource respectively. I see the form of exchange here as not just a complex one, but a 'power-initiated negotiated exchange'. For want of a better name for it, I prefer to call the complex superstructure it is based on a 'Power initiated negotiated Exchange Super-structure' (PINES)<sup>28</sup>. So, I conceive a super-social structure 'X', a large complex 'Exchange with starting investment structure' constituted of other social structures, including the organization, and a good number of processes. The closest model to this is Easton's 'economic exchange model' constructed for analyzing B2B relationships in industrial marketing (Easton 2010; cf. Easton 2002). Here is a respondent's (manager's) view about the [investment] transactional nature of the employer organisations and the employees' relations:

Respondent: If you don't have competent personnel, will you make the money? We use money to make money and that is what companies do...you train potential candidates and increase them and use them to run a contract and they will yield you more money.

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<sup>26</sup> Someone may argue that the reason the powerful actor provided the stimulus investment (incremental investment) is so they do not lose the investment in the human resource which can be viewed as the initial investment. Even if such argument were to hold, I can say that it is akin to stabilizing the relationship.

<sup>27</sup> I have assumed for ease of analysis that the exchange process in the labour-wage process within the larger transaction process starts with the injection of a stimulus investment in a SHRP. This is because a base case in the transaction process will be a situation where the organization hires an employee without investing in a SHRP and the transaction or exchange process had long been on.

<sup>28</sup> PINES is therefore a qualified form of negotiated exchange. Wherever I use 'Super structure', I mean, not a mechanical structure but a super social structure comprised of micro- and macro- social structures, and processes.

The cycle of exchange processes in the superstructure begins usually at the employee-employer basic structure where a labour exchange takes place. When the more powerful party, e.g. the employer organisation makes a “move,” and the employee reciprocates, ‘new rounds of exchange initiate’.

Another initiation property is the ‘interdependence of actors’ in social exchanges. This form of interdependence is not ‘reciprocal control’. According to Thibaut and Kelley (1959), for interdependence, ‘outcomes are based on a combination of parties’ efforts and mutual and complementary arrangements’. The essence of the ‘mutual interdependence’ is that there is expectation of an outcome of an improved financial wellbeing and satisfaction/fulfilment for every stakeholder in the superstructure (Bosse *et al.* 2009). Having analysed the concrete events, a causal analysis (Danermark *et al.* 2002: p52) is then required.

If desired (though not necessary), the research questions can be reformulated to read like this: Does a SHRP introduced in a power-initiated negotiated exchange superstructure (PINES) in an organisation influence the generation of improved financial wellbeing of the organisation (OFP) and those of other in- situ stakeholders? If it does, which mechanisms could explain the OFP resulting from the superstructure and what is the nature of the relationship between a SHRP and OFP?

### **5.3 Causal Analysis**

While GT conceptualizes at the empirical level to analyse the observed events, CR conceptualizes a different thing – one that causes that phenomenon (Easton 2010).

In the CR data analysis part of the extended framework, the objective is to identify the real entities, and the mechanisms – the way of acting of things, and determine the social structures - the way of relating of things.

### **5.3.1 Retroduce to Structures and Mechanisms (step 5)**

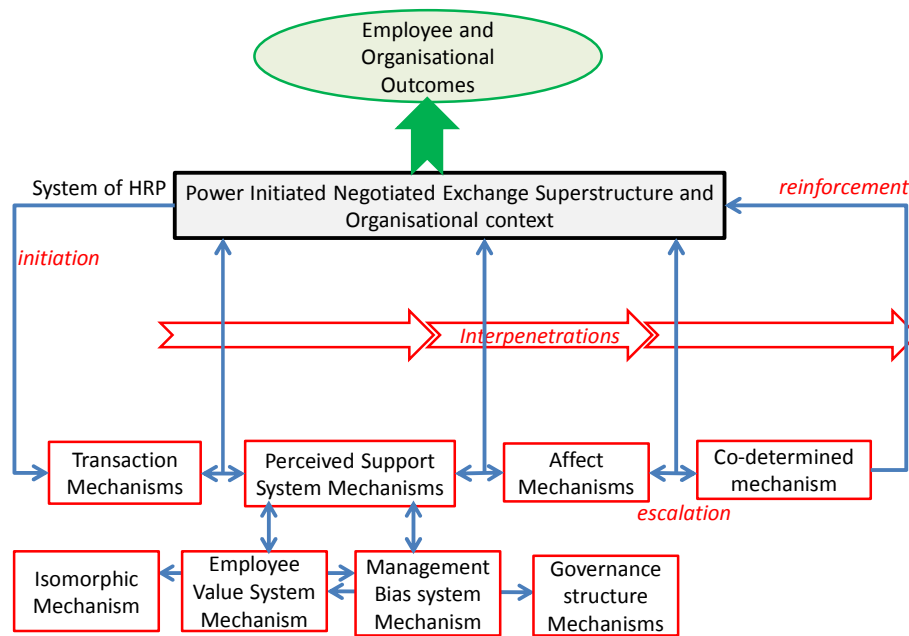
In this step, I imagine (thought-experiment) the different possible ways the identified objects in Table 2 and other objects interplay within PINES, and explore the causal powers and tendencies of each object in the interplay. Because there are more important causal powers and properties (hence generative mechanisms) which give the conceptualised super social structure its behaviour and characteristics, I will not belabour the fact that the persons inhabiting the social structures are composed of biological mechanisms underlain by chemical mechanisms which are underlain by physical mechanisms (Ibid.: p64).

#### **5.3.1.1 Identification of the Key or Distinct mechanisms**

I consider the interplay of the mostly social and ideal objects<sup>29</sup> in the superstructure (i.e. the interaction of their internal and external structures). Looking at how the host of objects would interplay, I am not expecting just one socio-economic mechanism, but very many types of mechanisms (see Fig. 9 below).

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<sup>29</sup> Fleetwood (2013) in his article noted that '(At least) four modes of reality can be identified: *material, ideal, artefactual* and *social*'. Ideal object refers to '*conceptual entities* like discourse, language, genres, signs, symbols and semiotised entities, texts, ideas, beliefs, meanings, understandings, explanations and concepts'. Socially real objects, like ideal ones contain no materiality so that we cannot touch them. Example is an organisation, according to Fleetwood is socially, conceptually, and ideally real.



**Figure 9** Emergence of HRM mechanisms triggering outcomes

The Fig 9 above shows more how the mechanisms are triggered by the interplay of objects in the superstructure (red level), what takes place at the green level will be expounded later below using Fig. 12 which shows how the emergent outcomes may be generated. At this juncture, I analyse the codes/concepts/categories and use snippets from the data (see Dirpal 2015 concerning use of snippets) to identify the micro-mechanisms which combine to form 8 key or distinct mechanisms identified and numbered I to VIII below, whose powers may be exercised, actualised or not.

#### I. Exchange Transaction mechanism

The interplay of the key objects *exchange transactions*; *cost-reducing behaviours*; *effort/labour-wage micromechanism*; *service-price micromechanism* through their external attributes as they engage in exchange activities would trigger socio-economic mechanism I refer to as *Exchange Transaction mechanism*. The labour-

wage impact and the sometimes hidden feature of reverse causality in the exchange transactions are underscored by the below employee's response:

The award tends to create more alertness, awakens people to be more alert on their environment and how to do things better. You go for a job, do the job successfully, you come back, besides your salary, your company sets aside some bonuses for you to just put smiles on your face, you see the excitement and happiness that is associated with these extra bonuses that people earn. It makes them put in more to make sure they get the job done properly.

The general manager underlines the link between happiness (affect) of all organisational stakeholders, the training investment, expectations, and cost-reducing behaviour of the trained employee thus:

Yeah! The training is linked to happiness and satisfaction to staff. First: when you give a staff a responsibility or task to execute, because you have equipped him mentally with the necessary training or know-how needed to carry out that operation, when he goes to the operation he delivers as designed and on time, you find out that he himself will have peace of mind, he will be smiling, he will be happy because he has fulfilled his task without any hitches, without NPT, without incurring unnecessary cost; Internally, that job satisfaction will be there for him because each time he goes no matter how difficult it is you have equipped him knowledge-wise, so he delivers. The moment he finishes his job he is happy. At the same time, [not just him the executioner in the field] you in the office/base are happy. You are not going to get different calls from client asking you 'who is that person you put in there, your equipment is failing..job not delivered'..calls coming day and night, you are not going to sleep with your two eyes closed.

The general manager is also in a good position to tell us (as below) how HRPs can influence clients thereby triggering what I refer to as the service-price micromechanism:

Now this is for the service provider, coming to your client, same thing. If he gives you a job to do and you go there and do as designed and on time, you find that he has less problem, he can go home and sleep; he is not talking about deferment of production, or that his well might be put on fire, or

condemned, etc. A well producing 3 to 10 thousand barrels a day committed into your hands..If you are an engineer that delivers as designed and on time, he will be happy and at the end of the day from the highest to the lowest cadre will be happy as more oil is produced at less cost for them. So it is both ways.

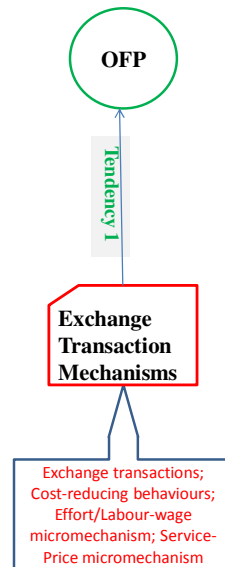
Respondents kept indicating the exchanges involved among employees and employers when they talked about using money to make money implying that an actor or representative must give something in exchange if his needs – socioemotional or strategic – must be met by the others. One can infer the existence of these exchange processes in the below statement from a respondent. For an organisation to expect to have productivity and quality services, and then perform financially, it has to train her workforce very well, among other expenses.

Chief Accountant: [A]nd the job is also paid according to the quality- that is why for you to have quality output there must be training and you are paid according to quality of work done, personnel are charged/paid according to knowledge acquisition vis a vis their productivity. And an engineer who is just a trainee cannot impact the job as a well-trained personnel can. Clients cannot pay a trainee same as a well trained personnel or supervisor the same price charged by the company. If I receive X amount of money for a supervisor I receive little or nothing for trainee. So you find that my earnings/revenue as a company is a function of the kind of personnel I have in the system. Two, the kind of job I could be called out for is a function of the kind of personnel I have. Just as I said, ours is a specialized service, not just any person/engineer who can do it. You must be someone who has been trained to do that kind of job so that the rewards a company gets out of the service is a function of the personnel sent to do the job- there are jobs a helper or engineer Trainee can do and ones a specialist Supervisor can do which are all related to the kind/level of payment received by the company. Again in contracts we equally see the contract you get is a function of the trainings acquired. You cannot have just any contract awarded to any company. For companies with highly skilled or specialised personnel, they receive high risk contracts requiring highly skilled engineers/workers. We equally work with risks where payment is on hourly basis so it is not for anybody. So training is necessary to handle the risks. Training assures you for tomorrow because everything is graduating.

Data reveals the outcome of the acting of the mechanisms shown by an employee's response below.

When you are rewarded, you are comfortable and stable [wellbeing] and come work more efficiently, with the motivation you are able to give out more ..this is how I see it.

Snippets like 'comfortable and stable' signify the powers of expectations, labour-wage micromechanism. 'Fulfilled his task without any hitches, without non-productive time (NPT)' is a training-induced cost-reducing behaviour. Looking at Appendix D, codes like 'competences related to cost reduction', 'TD mediated by safe quality cost effective service (SQCES) leads to OFP', and 'TD leads to employee improved performance and to reduced NPT' signify cost reduction tendencies. 'The award..awakens people to be more alert to their environment...and how to do things better' link labour to wage and bonuses in a transactional effort to create improved employee performance. All these feed into the exchange transaction mechanism's powers/tendencies to reduce cost and influence OFP. The reader should take notice how affect mechanism interpenetrates/combines with exchange transaction mechanism here. Fig. 10 below shows how micro-mechanisms form the Exchange transaction mechanism whose powers/tendencies may generate cost-reduction and enhance the financial wellbeing of employees, organisation, and clients (tagged 'Tendency 1' in the figure) which may result in increased OFP.



**Fig. 10** Micromechanisms of Exchange Transaction mechanism with its power/tendencies

Other mechanisms and their tendencies are shown in an all-encompassing HRM mechanisms-tendencies diagram in Fig. 11 below. In the figure, from the left of the block, block arrows containing micromechanisms feed the distinct mechanisms which generate tendencies (described below in the legend area) leading to outcomes and a terminal outcome OFP.

## II. Perceived Support System mechanisms

Other mechanisms influence and are influenced by the starting Exchange Transaction mechanism. The interaction of the perceptive and supportive attributes of the human actors, namely *SHRP as stimulus; perceptual systems; expectation; supporting or equipping partner; recognition of partner's contributions*, in interplay triggers psychological mechanisms I refer to as *Perceived support system (PSS) mechanisms*. Aspects of these mechanisms exist at the employee, employer organization and client organisation levels. An employee in the security department

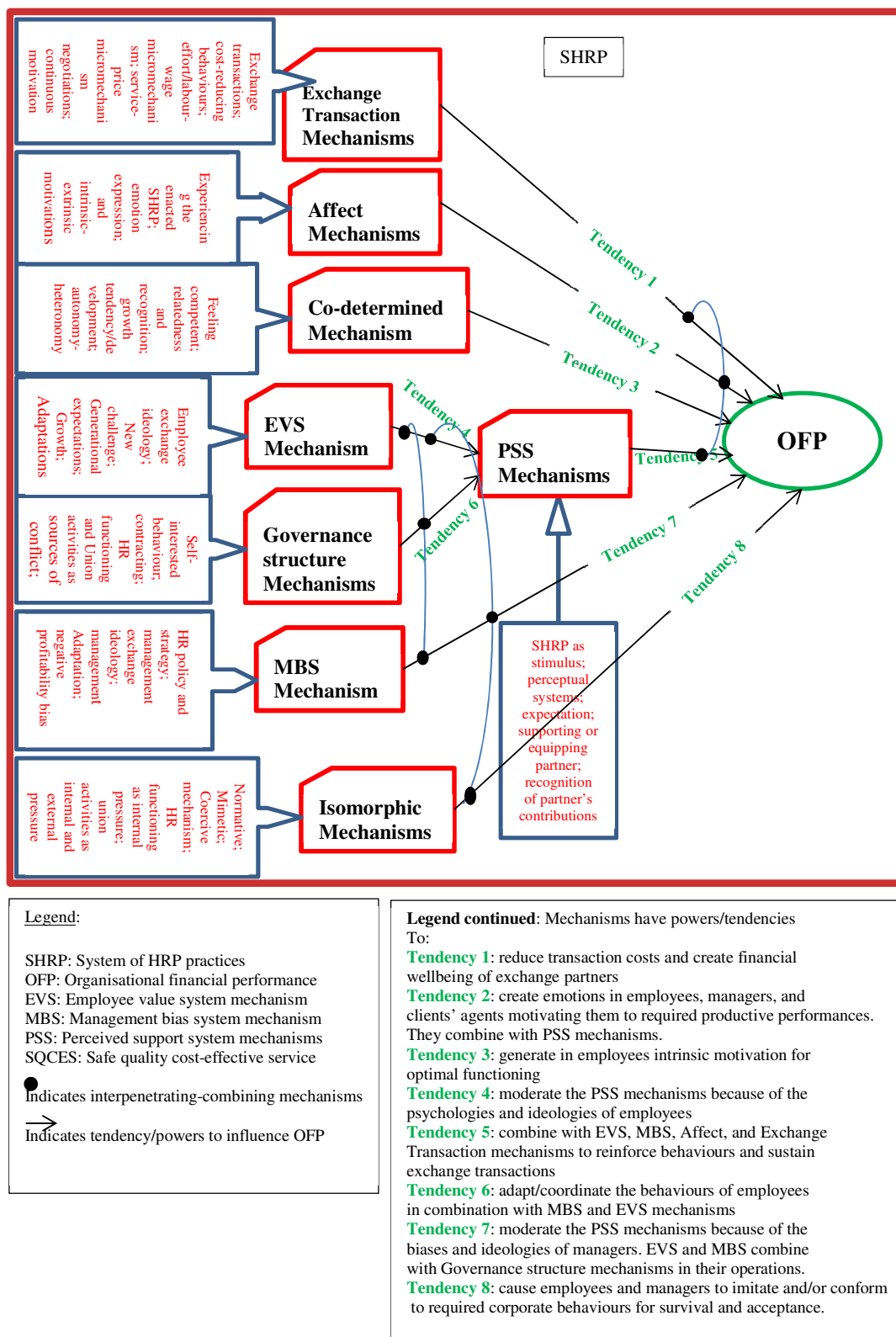


Fig.11 HRM distinct mechanisms with their micromechanisms and tendencies

responded as below about recognition and management perception about and response to employee contribution:

Your Attitude during work will Attract management (and management is all of us) and then Attention will be given to you and they will compensate you and congratulate you. A supervisor was cultivating the flowers there and his job attracted management and he was rewarded with cash gift and handshake. Others were given commendation letter and N20K. People are being promoted here.

Recognising an employee's contribution may entail praising her/him or giving gifts.

This is how an employee captures the effect of praise on performance.

If you praise a child or any human, the person tends to be gingered to do more good. Praises could come verbally, in form of gifts..Hail the king, he is already a king, but when you hail him more you get to the soft part of him.

Another employee touching on perceptions and expectations said:

Oil workers are seen in Nigeria as earning high so that expectation is high..people even train themselves to enter to get a job knowing that, expecting that they will get rewards.

Expectation is across board. Just as employees have high expectations, employers and clients also have. A respondent – a HR supervisor captures this view below.

For Oil and gas worker, first job risk is high..that is why safety is important. secondly, because of the high risk of operations training is more valued...if you don't train, the risk is even higher..Even if other companies don't, Oil and gas companies put more emphasis on training..you are working on live wells, fire outbreak can occur anytime with any sight mistake. you dont just push novices to such areas..that is why you need adequate training so those workers can handle those jobs safely without problems..you cannot compare this with other industry sectors with less risk..Secondly oil and gas companies know what they are looking for and they go out to get them,..no company will pay you if you cannot perform..you are working on a well and you drop some junk into that well, the client will not pay you..Expertise...as a service company you are seen as expert and you are given a job to handle so you are expected to meet or exceed the client's expectation.

A respondent interpreted training as 'equipment' or 'support' of employees. Another reflected that training is like 'sharpening a tool' so that without training it is difficult to perform. Yet another suggested that training gave him knowledge and prepared him well to deliver. Employees attribute the source of their equipment or support as the employer organisation and they perceive that the employer organization supports them by their provisioning and recognitions. Further, 'Snippets' from data like 'compensate you and congratulate you', 'attention given to you'; you get to the soft part of him'; 'oil workers are seen in Nigeria as earning high', and 'expectation is high' signifying PSS powers/tendencies to stimulate and reinforce employee behaviour through its combining with other mechanisms like Affect and EVS and MBS. The interplay of the emerging concepts and categories, namely relatedness, 'dimensions of recognition', 'training generates feelings of competence' depict the objects attributed to PSS mechanisms.

### III. Affect mechanisms

The objects *experiencing the enacted SHRP; emotion expression; and intrinsic-extrinsic motivations* interplay in the superstructure PINES. Consequent to any perception with the interaction of the internal and external structures of these ideal objects and their human actors is the invocation of emotions by the perceiving human actors triggering the physio-psychological mechanisms I refer to as *Affect mechanisms*, always co-existing with the PSS mechanisms at the various organisational and emergent levels. An engineer in a panel interview responded this way about what [extrinsically] motivates him:

When you are rewarded, you are comfortable and stable [wellbeing] and come work more efficiently, with the motivation you are able to give out more ..this is how I see it.

Yet another engineer stated:

....employee puts in something. If he gets a reward, he will be motivated to put in more. He was able to get a reward without putting more...that's why we call it reward..the employee going the extra mile for the company. I think what is lying in the gap is motivation. the employee can't go for extra mile without being motivated. the reward must be good enough to keep the employee motivated.

Snippets from the above responses, 'With the motivation you are able to give out more..'; 'can't go extra mile without being motivated' tie motivation to agency ('..to put in more'; '..give out more'; 'can't go extra mile without being motivated'); and 'motivation influences employee performance in the field' as in below response signify the powers/tendencies of affect mechanisms to productive behaviours.

Another engineer responded on extrinsic motivation through the RB system:

What I am trying to say is that some people are motivated by reward..some feel they are not paid what they are worth..I drew motivation in between in my diagram; each of the factors I listed have an effect on motivation.. the employer should have the objective of making sure the employee remains motivated. Employer should look at each of the factors that will increase motivation considerably since motivation influences employee performance in the field.

A couple of employees and managers noted that when employers pay employees as agreed, they are happy and motivated and can go the 'extra mile' for the organisation. Affect mechanisms can also be seen to be generated from the interplay of the concepts and categories - affect, 'training generates feelings of competence', relatedness and 'reverse causality'.

#### IV. Co-Determined mechanism

The interplay of *feeling competent; relatedness and recognition; growth tendency/development; and autonomy-heteronomy* triggers a socio-psychological

mechanism I refer to as a *Co-determined mechanism*. An employee stated thus about growth tendency/development:

We must consider development not just training. People can get saturated if you just train them without developing them. The trained person can leave if he feels no development is taking place. Boredom sets in..

The snippet 'boredom sets in..' signifies that intrinsically motivated employees will function optimally when there is no boredom as they are co-determined. An engineer said the below about training which is linked to feeling competent and autonomy-heteronomy:

Training boosts your confidence on a job. you are sure, confident.

Feeling competent post-training derives its meaning in the context of the organisation's understanding of who a competent employee is. Data reveals that respondents associated training to building employee's competence and positioning him/her to take 'new challenges' in the future. Another respondent saw rewards as making employees feel 'belonging' which signals relatedness. Data further revealed that there are five components of relatedness, namely social recognition, equity (equal opportunity), fidelity (keeping contractual agreements), socio-cultural factors (Kinship/cultural affinity), and climate (provision of conducive working environment). Yet another respondent saw training as a process that regulates the actions or behaviours of employees guiding them to discharge their roles in particular ways. Co-determined (not self-determined) mechanism can also be seen to be generated by the interplay of the categories - competence, relatedness, and co-determination.

V. Employee Value System (EVS) mechanism

The socio-cultural networks in which the employees and the managers are embedded interact with the perceptive attributes of these human actors in the form of the *employee exchange ideology; new challenge; generational expectations; and perceptual systems* whose interplay trigger the socio-cultural mechanism I refer to as *Employee value system mechanism (EVS)*. The EVS mechanism tends to moderate the components of the PSS mechanisms (further analysed below) which in turn affect the level of outcomes generated by these mechanisms. I highlight that the constituent objects, evident in some codes and concepts interplay to generate the EVS mechanism.

An employee in the panel interview interjected:

Petroleum workers are more expectant. Nowadays people use what they call 'Bragging rights', to mean I was trained in Houston, in Dubai, abroad, etc.

On new challenge and growth/development which sustain employees' passion, an employee had this to say:

I like to take it back to development. If there is development, humans see themselves as starting afresh with a new challenge which keeps them moving on. They want to jump into that challenge. But when you just sit him down and only give him training and rewards without challenge he gets bored..it is not enough. The human mind needs that distraction through challenges that get his mind off leaving..and secondly I also think that there is a stage people get to they are no longer moved by money after they see they can afford some basic needs in life, they need challenge, what evokes their passion is not just what you pay them in terms of Naira and kobo.

Yet another differentiated generational psychologies and expectations by stating that:

One could argue that rewards are better for younger persons while more mature employees bother more about benefits....

The internal and external structures of the above objects in interplay have similarities which create the connection amongst them. They are similar in that they

point to the values and beliefs most important to different classes of employees, which influence their perceptions. The objects define an employee's core values and personality traits which may influence his/her decisions and actions.

*Employees' exchange ideologies* and their high expectations influence their responses to and perceptions of the support given by the employer or his agent. Petroleum workers, especially field workers, have a very high expectation to effort ratio due to the fact that theirs is a very risky job.

*'Generational and Age expectations'*: Expectations vary with employee age and generation. Millennials (a respondent called them 'generation X') may have different expectations and worldview compared to older generation employees about what is fulfilling when it comes to, for example, employment perks. Older workers see new challenge as a test or contest, an unfinished business, and the '*new challenge*' sustains their expectation keeping them from leaving the organisation even with better offers coming from competitors. See data extract above.

Snippets like 'there is a stage people get to they are no longer moved by money'; 'the human mind needs that distraction through challenges', 'rewards are better for younger persons..' point to the causal powers of the psychologies and ideologies of the employee hence the powers/tendencies of employee's value system. The tendency of EVS mechanism would be to influence the perception of employees determining their decisions and actions when stimulated by a SHRP. Employees whose roles are to give out (invest in) work efforts in expectation of exchange

resources for meeting their basic needs (e.g. being trained and remunerated) are influenced by their own value systems including their exchange ideologies. EVS mechanism acting suggests that employees have a very high expectation – to - effort ratio contingent on their view about the riskiness of their exchange tasks, their personalities, and age, giving them (employees) a tendency to be brutal or generous while responding to their perceptions of how fairly they are treated by the management.

#### VI. Management Belief system (MBS) mechanism

Some ideal objects – *HR policy and strategy; management exchange ideology; management adaptation; and negative profitability bias* interplay to generate the socio-cultural mechanism I refer to as *Management belief system mechanism (MBS)*. The internal and external structures of these objects have similarities which create the connection amongst them. They point to management's beliefs and biases. These beliefs and biases influence management decisions and actions and are capable of varying the supportive actions management provides employees. Several codes emergent from the data depict these objects and some of them could be viewed as micromechanisms. HR policy and strategy analysed here as a reflection of managements' beliefs and biases, indicated by micromechanisms in the data e.g. *poaching, engineer shelf-life bias, management commitment to HR plans, negative profitability bias, and forced tenure legislation* is captured by a HR supervisor thus:

When we started having this problem of poaching of our staff, we came up with a policy..every new employee especially trainee must sign a commitment. max number of years of training of 2 to 3 years and after that you work with the company for minimum of 5 years.

One thing I see is management commitment to training and development plans. ....Management commitment is one of the major challenges. In management cadre some look at it as waste of resources- that is why some companies poach saying that after training what guarantee do you have that the person stays.[laughter]

The response above portrays opportunistic behaviour and biases – poaching by management. The belief by some managers as in the response above that TD investment could be a ‘waste of resources’ could be viewed as a negative profitability bias.

The respondent also reveals ‘conflict’ between management commitment and HR function’. It shows that ‘management beliefs can come into conflict with HR function’ and ‘poaching as HR strategy’ can conflict with the HR function. These tendencies impact implementing HRPs like TD (i.e. they impact HRM). In the petroleum industry and in many industries, organisations, through their managements, have a tendency to poach other organisation’s trained employees. Where the tendency becomes an organisational culture, it can negate a reciprocity exchange rule and sometimes frustrate the HR function.

A ‘*shelf life bias*’ as in the data analysis is a management belief that the shelf life of oil-service field engineers is 5 to 10 years. This belief is based on another belief that the field work is stressful and risky, and carried out in hazardous environments, requiring that engineers spend months offshore away from their families. Because of this belief, managements prefer younger engineers for field works. The upshot of the view of an oil Field Engineer shelf life of 5-10 years is management’s bias that trainees may not stay long with the organisation hence ‘*Staff retention biases*’ as data analysis reveals. Believing that employees may not reciprocate the

organisation's investment and that poaching goes on in the industry, managements, in a bid to reap some form of dividend from their investment in the employee, may *force loyalty and organizational membership* by instituting tenure limits and criteria for cross-training or being promoted, among other practices. Forcing loyalty in this manner may erode an employee's autonomous discretion to be loyal or not.

The '*Forced management Commitment view*' as in the data analysis is based on some management's belief that their actions are constrained by some factors such as union-induced pay packages, etc. *Management's exchange ideology* in relation to the work effort and loyalty of employee are, it is believed, generally guided by the norm of reciprocity rule. From the data, it seems that in most cases, management's exchange ideology is guided by intense selfish interest to reap some benefit from the organisation's HR investments, not by the reciprocity norm. The MBS mechanism has a tendency to influence the perceptions of management about employee commitment and client support. MBS mechanism acting suggests that managements could be very selfish and biased with behaviours that negate the reciprocity rule contingent on the biases and personalities of the manager (s).

So far, the data analysis suggests that distinct PSS mechanisms' emergent generation of outcomes are contingent on their combination and interpenetration with other mechanisms – Exchange Transaction, Affect, EVS and MBS.

## VII. Governance structure mechanism

The interplay of objects *self-interested behaviour; contracting; HR functioning and Union activities as sources of conflict; and management adaptations* triggers what I

refer to as *Governance structure mechanism*. No one is expected to be in a better position to give insight into how the organisation or management governs employee behaviours and adapts than the Managing director. He responded to a question thus:

..when you have better trained personnel you achieve efficiency on the job, down time is mitigated, you have professionals who can execute the job in record time, and therefore you get more financial benefits than untrained personnel who incur lost time and affect the reputation of the company and may even knock off the contract from you and then on the other hand you pay back by rewarding the personnel by way of improved payment and increased benefits and gradually motivate them to put in more interest and time.

Here is an employee's view about how management adapts to the opportunistic behaviour of employees using HR functions and restores order by reviewing employee contract terms post employee turnover/disloyalty disorder.

Some years back we had serious exodus in our sister department because they felt the other companies are paying more for people that render their [kind of] services. We lost quite a lot of good hands to the multinationals. Yes, we covered up but it was not easy. Nobody would want to, after training people, lose them like that when they were supposed to plug back into the system....So if they are on ten pieces of gold per month rather than keep your people on 2 and 3 you can pick them up to 6..we may not get to 10 with them.....we have their conditions of service.

HR function and management can be in conflict as a HR supervisor hints below and management has to align these conflicting interests by adapting and using her governance structures:

When you train an employee and keep him on developmental path, you must match that training and developmental path with rewards else the company will lose because after training the person and putting him on the right track and when he looks up and finds the rewards and benefits cannot take him home any longer, he looks for where he gets a fatter salary that can take him home..that is natural..then the company loses. After training, the Company loses the employee they invested heavily

on and begins to blame HR. It is not an HR issue..it is a management issue...understanding the dynamics..how this thing works.

Concerning the possibility of employee contract terms negotiations with Unions, conflict may occur and management must adapt and manage these. HR personnel again highlights on this.

We have conditions of service which is reviewed every 3 years. Every 3 years there is negotiation between management and PENGASSAN (for senior staff) and management and NUPENG (for junior staff). Every aspect is reviewed. In as much as we work on these incentives, the conditions of service are reviewed every three years...an in-depth thing.

Snippets like ‘..you get more financial benefits than from untrained personnel who incur lost time and affect the reputation of the company’ tells the direction of the corporate strategy and what management thinks about training investment as a cost-reducing strategy and about RB as reinforcement of positive behaviour and motivation factor. The use of ‘on the other hand you pay back by rewarding..’ is indicative that management perceives and responds to employee behaviour. ‘We had serious exodus’ post-training is indicative of disloyal self-interested/opportunistic trained employees. These snippets signify the powers/tendencies of the governance structure mechanisms to coordinate employee behaviour and mitigate conflict and restore order. Take notice how the governance structure mechanism combines with the management ideologies (constituting MBS mechanism) in its acting. The tendency of governance structure mechanism is to adapt/coordinate the behaviours of employees in combination with MBS and EVS mechanisms.

#### VIII. Isomorphic mechanisms

The interplay of objects coded in the data analysis as *Normative; Mimetic; Coercive mechanisms; HR functioning as internal pressure; and Union activities as internal and external pressure* trigger what I refer to as *Isomorphic mechanisms*. HR supervisor's statement below indicates that the company had to mimic other companies faced with employee turnover (idea of reviewing salaries upward is seen as a norm in organisations during employee turnover). During turnover, the HR function may have been under pressure and may have also internally pressurized the management; the workers' Union inside and outside the company may have, during the recession, pressurised management in some ways. This is aside the often conflict-inducing pressures during negotiations (see data excerpt above under governance structure mechanism) with Unions - PENGASSAN and NUPENG.

In 2007 majority of our experienced hands left due to oil recession.....We had to start reviewing our salary. We had to look for new incentives that can boost the monthly pay. We found out that when you train an employee to a particular level of experience that Training and experience must be matched with a compensation or the monthly take home. If that experience is not matched with his monthly take home he leaves and goes to where he can get what he wants and that is exactly what we did. We had to review the entire salary, consolidate and give incentives to specific areas. The tension came down, the situation came to normalcy and that was how we brought the movement of staff down. It worked.

The power/tendency of Isomorphic mechanisms generates a conforming or survivalist disposition with the employer organisation or employees under isomorphic pressures (coercive or mimetic) to do things in certain (considered 'normal' and therefore 'acceptable' within the organisation and larger society) ways.

In the context of HRM-P, other researchers can validate the mechanisms identified above through the identification of 'candidate affordances'. According to

Bygstad *et al.* (2016), the analyst can identify the focal affordances and then relate them to the higher-level (less concrete) mechanisms identified earlier in the retroduction step. The interplay of affordances can be abstracted to higher-level complex mechanisms. By considering each of the different types of actors in turn, the analyst can identify the variety of salient concrete outcomes that might result as each of these 'goal-directed' actors interact with the SHRP. From employees acting, it is possible to identify the concrete outcomes. I have left the use of affordance as possible future research direction.

I continue to follow Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) to analyse the identified key mechanisms. The Exchange Transaction mechanism generates the outcome or results in relationship stability (including organisational stability and change), financial wellbeing of the stakeholders indicated by the sizes of their wages, fees, and oil price, and then the functioning of the stakeholders. By analysing the micro-mechanisms, we can have the insight into how the complex Exchange Transaction mechanism acts. The result of the Co-determined mechanism is optimal functioning or performance of the PINES through the intrinsic motivation of the employee. See Figure 12 below. The result of the Affect mechanisms is the channeling of the emotions of all stakeholders into and through the PINES as 'drivers of behaviours'. Stakeholders may 'go extra mile' to repay perceived fair behaviour by a social partner or deal more ruthlessly with a partner when they perceive unfair behaviour (Bosse *et al.* 2009; Akerlof 1982; Hom *et al.* 2009). The result of the PSS mechanisms is a reinforcement of positive behaviours of the stakeholders triggered by a combination of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations which are consequences of perceived socio-emotional resources. Three key mechanisms, namely Exchange

Transaction, PSS and Co-determined mechanisms always act through and in combination with the Affect mechanisms. The tendency of a PSS mechanism is to 'escalate' its effect. I use the concept 'escalation' to denote the tendency of the generative mechanism to start its impact from a low level and escalate<sup>30</sup> it to a higher level, of course with the possibility for changes along the way. Thus, the effects of a SHRP mediated by a PSS mechanism would normally start from the employee level and escalate to the organisational or client level; from time zero to future time effect; by reason of activities like communication and socializing; go from impacting one stakeholder (employee) to impacting a group, to impacting all stakeholders (managers and clients); and contingent on contextual mechanisms, could generate different levels of HR and organisational outcomes. These processes and actions take place concurrently in the HRM-P phenomenon. Since they are interdependent and interpenetrating, there is no marked beginning or end as some actions and processes send feedback or signals to other agents (and to the superstructure PINES) spurring their actions or reactions reproducing those actions and transforming the agents. The reader must remember that to bound the analysis, I had assumed that there is a starting mechanism – the transactional investment in a SHRP by the organisation.

The result of the EVS mechanism is the aiding or counteracting of the activities of the Affect and PSS mechanisms as a result of the nature of the employees' value systems and personalities, while the result of the MBS mechanism is the aiding or

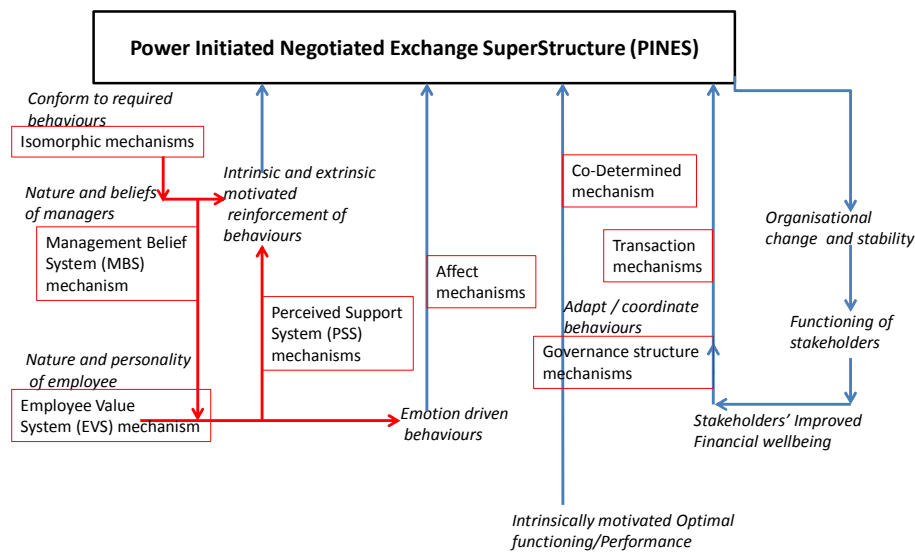
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<sup>30</sup> It may be argued that PSS mechanisms 'progress organically' - slowly and steadily instead of rapidly growing as escalation suggests. I prefer escalation if only to show that its generative effects rise emergently from different directions and levels (with moderation) and then converging. A SHRP will need to escalate its effects to go from proximal outcomes to distal outcomes - productivity and loyalty and further to SQCES and to OFP for example.

counteracting of the Affect and PSS mechanisms as a result of the nature of the managers' biases, beliefs, and personalities. The mechanisms – EVS and MBS - influence the perceptions and emotions of the employees and managers. By interacting with the co-determination, support, and transaction processes, they moderate those mechanisms.

The precondition for each of these mechanisms to act is that within the PINES, a power imbalance exists between the key actors; the presumption that the partner with an upper hand is expected to lead by providing an on-time incremental investment to *start* the various processes and in combination with other processes, to maintain or keep the exchange *stable* and *reinforce* processes; and the assumption that all actors are in the least expected to reciprocate the actions of their social partners even though this is not always the case as other rules may guide behaviour. In combination, the layered and combining-interpenetrating key mechanisms provide explanation as to how the PINES generates first level functioning and financial wellbeing of stakeholders, then second-level or optimal functioning and improved financial wellbeing of all stakeholders (particularly the OFP of the investing organization) contingent on the EVS and MBS mechanisms.

The notion that the mechanisms identified are layered, emergent, interpenetrate one another and are in multimesh is difficult to describe qualitatively though I have attempted to do this in section 6.2 below. By carefully reviewing how each complex mechanism emerges through its micro-mechanisms, the interpenetration and multimesh of these complex mechanisms may be evident. But,



**Figure 12** The 8 distinct HRM mechanisms and their concrete outcomes

due to the complexity and open-systemic nature of our phenomenon and the HRM-P blackbox, it is not easy to show how the multitude of enabling, stimulating and releasing conditions synthetically combine to result in the three preconditions of enabling power-imbalance, stimulating on-time incremental investment, and releasing reciprocating actions by stakeholders. The integration of the knowledges of these micro-mechanisms and the complex key mechanisms with their preconditions is an area also needing further study. Such study will further the understanding of how the identified complex mechanisms act and aid the explanation and the succinct definition of the HRM-P phenomenon and field respectively.

The step 6 in the framework 'Causal explanation - Concretization and contextualization' wherein I consider how the candidate mechanisms identified interact and combine to causally explain the HRM-P phenomenon and to answer the research questions is discussed as part of chapter 6 - the discussion chapter. I have

also preserved step 7 for chapter 7. With the GT coding and CR-data analysis completed as above, in the next section, I use the theoretical framework to frame the data analysis thereby interrogating and substantiating (validating) further the results of the data analysis.

#### **5.4 Framing the data analysis using the integrated theoretical framework (step 8)**

Generally, this step involves searching the data for patterns which may identify causal links if existing (see Yin 2009: p41). Specifically, it involves reviewing the codes, concepts and categories, looking for patterns that show how a SHRP is linked to causal mechanisms in exchange transactions between employees and employers; showing how such linkages instigate employees' productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours and other stakeholders' behaviours; showing how all these generate an organisation's increased OFP; and trying to identify what mechanisms, and what other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP. In framing the data analysis, I also reference the conjectures made in chapter 2. Decomposing the framework, it comes out that it is concerned with:

Frame #1: How a SHRP connects to behaviour through governance structures and other causal mechanisms; and

Frame #2: How behaviour connects to OFP.

I frame this analysis taking few excerpts from data while looking for patterns.

Data as below reveals that multiple stakeholders are impacted by the causal powers of the HRPs through influencing their behaviours or performances. Employees,

employer organisation, clients, and the society are all affected by the HRP's of the employer organisation.

Senior management respondent: Yeah! The training is linked to happiness and satisfaction to staff.

First: when you give a staff a responsibility or task to execute, because you have equipped him mentally with the necessary training or know-how needed to carry out that operation, when he goes to the operation he delivers as designed and on time, you find out that he himself will have peace of mind, he will be smiling, he will be happy because he has fulfilled his task without any hitches, without NPT, without incurring unnecessary cost; Internally, that job satisfaction will be there for him because each time he goes no matter how difficult it is you have equipped him knowledge-wise, so he delivers. The moment he finishes his job he is happy. At the same time, [not just him the executioner in the field] you in the office/base are happy. You are not going to get different calls from client asking you 'who is that person you put in there, your equipment is failing..job not delivered'..calls coming day and night, you are not going to sleep with your two eyes closed..unfortunately if you are a blood pressure (BP) patient your BP might rise beyond your immediate control. So, It is a problem. Now this is for the service provider, coming to your client, same thing. If he gives you a job to do and you go there and do as designed and on time, you find that he has less problem, he can go home and sleep; he is not talking about deferment of production, or that his well might be put on fire, or condemned, etc. A well producing 3 to 10 thousand barrels a day committed into your hands..If you have an engineer that delivers as designed and on time, he will be happy and at the end of the day from the highest to the lowest cadre will be happy as more oil is produced at less cost for them.

From the above data, training affects employee behaviour and creates happiness and job satisfaction not just in the employee but in the managers, and the client's agents.

Senior management respondent: ....So, as I was saying on the issue of training and financial performance of a company, that for us as service company, service delivery quality matters and for you to be able to give service quality that is acceptable above the expectation of the client you have to train your staff, they have to undergo various courses on each of the services you are providing for the client and hence after they undergo these courses, they come back, the improvement on their performance will be appreciated and if they give you improved services that means the NPT you might get on a

particular job or operation will be averted and if you consider the cost of NPT both to the client and to you in everything in the 360 degrees consideration you find out that for every trained engineer or operator the financial implication compared to the cost of training to his performance you find that it is a chicken feed you spend in the training...each well they work on costs 7 to 10 million dollars depending on onshore or offshore, some cost more up to 30M dollars if deep offshore which we are involved in, But when you train them and they deliver the services as at when due and at cheaper price the client will be happy and you as service provider will be assured of continued job, the client will always call you as you give needed service delivery. So there is a strong relationship between training of staff and financial performance, not just for you but for your client and also the environment. Remember that you are also working in a community if you don't train your personnel if you enter into the trouble of oil spill you know how much it takes you to come out of that. Infact, the issue of the relationship between training and financial performance is a very big subject, and we can never stop analysing it.

From the above data, training is linked to organisational financial performance mediated by its connection to cost-reducing behaviour, i.e. the reduction of non-productive time (NPT) and thereby costs. Data below links training-induced employee performance to their (employee) financial wellbeing and improved OFP.

HR respondent: TD leads to increased productivity, and that to increase in compensation or reward for the staff and same time increase in productivity leads to increase in company's turnover. Employee takes a little from the income and the rest goes to the company, i.e. financial performance for the organisation.

Senior management respondent: Of course it does affect the performance because when you have better trained personnel you achieve efficiency on the job, down time is mitigated, you have professionals who can execute the job in record time, and therefore you get more financial benefits than untrained personnel who incur lost time and affect the reputation of the company and may even knock off the contract from you and then on the other hand you pay back by rewarding the personnel by way of improved payment and increased benefits and gradually motivate them to put in more interest and time. It is a two way situation.

Data reveals also that managements hold some biases and beliefs which moderate their behaviours and responses in the system.

HR respondent: One thing I see is management commitment to training and development plans.....  
You may schedule people for training and sometimes management says no money. Will you kill management? Management has to take some of the blames for failure. That is one of the challenges- Management commitment is one of the major challenges. In management cadre some look at it as waste of resources- that is why some companies poach saying that after training what guarantee do you have that the person stays.[laughter]

Further, data reveals how HRP links governance structure and behaviour.

Question: How do you make a staff happy? This happiness index, what can the company do to make people happy using training and development or rewards and benefits as levers to create happiness.  
How can we use them to make people happy?

Management respondent: Most of these are agreements signed. Management knows that if they do not treat the person well the person leaves. When you pay them as agreed they are happy.

Question: So as a manager, whether there is a union negotiation or not will you still go on with rewards and benefits practices?

Management respondent: Yes..I will make documentation to top management..that is how promotion comes...There was a job we did at Jones Creek the guys who did the job were promoted because they did the job well..made life easier for you. When you tell them what to do when they do it and come back you may need to *give them a pat on the back* either by promotion or salary increase..there is a special bonus we normally give we call it performance merit award which is outside the union negotiated agreements.

Data above reveals that there are contracts (agreements) between employer and employee. The code 'union negotiated agreement as contract' is indicative of a governance structure. There is evidence that Corporate strategy and Institutional and political forces - respectively the internal and external pressures for

organisations' environments - are determinants (or moderators) of HR practices' decisions and behaviours.

Question: How regularly do you do this (salary reviews)?

HR respondent: Not a regular thing. We have conditions of service which is reviewed every 3 years. Every 3 years there is negotiation between management and PENGASSAN (for senior staff) and management and NUPENG (for junior staff). Every aspect is reviewed. In as much as we work on these incentives, the conditions of service are reviewed every three years...an in-depth thing.

Question: So the union has input?

HR respondent: Yes.

Question: Rewards and benefits, is it not a draw down on company's finances?

Management respondent: No. It is agreed with the trade unions and is binding.

Data shows the institutional pressure from Unions indicated by codes such as 'union pressure as internal context', union activities as 'conflict inducing on HR management or HR function'. By my experience in the petroleum industry, I consider 'Union activities' these days as hardly resulting in business efficiency as it 'increases transaction costs' in the governing contract between employee and employer.

Question: There is a negotiation and the union is involved..what are the problems you have as I don't want to believe you don't have problems..especially in the area of TD and RB. What are the things you'd really like to tackle?

HR respondent: Now see..every department has its own challenges..operations will table theirs if you go to them...maybe they need more equipment. To the stores department...same thing HR has its problems. One, every HR policy is tied to the organisational goal..if you are a HR manager and your policy is anti-management you can't work well..your policy must be tied to the organisational goal since you cannot work in isolation you are part of the management just like the theory of collective stability, at the management cadre you are there where every issue is discussed. It is HR that comes to

implement. We may need some staff..management states what they need..sometimes influence, over-riding influence can be from clients, from top management, community, and from others in the society. You as HR man sometimes have to be rigid-the uncompromising type- as far as recruitment is concerned because management gave you a target saying this is what we want..no matter where the candidate is coming from you must take the best..such influences must not over-ride your decisions.

Data reveals the 'internal and external institutional pressures' the HR function faces: external are client, community, the society at large, government, industrial unions; Internal are company chapter of industrial unions, and top management.

With most of the steps of the extended framework (except steps 5 and 7) including the causal analysis (identification of causal mechanisms) completed, I now move on to outlining the results/findings of the data analysis followed by a summary of the chapter.

## **5.5 Results and Findings**

### **5.5.1 Results**

The output of GT analysis includes the codes, concepts, and categories (see Appendices C, D, E, and F). From the CR part of the analysis, a structure - Power-Initiated Negotiated Exchange superstructure - resulted. Candidate mechanisms were identified. The 8 distinct key mechanisms identified are Socio-psychological mechanisms referred to as Co-determined mechanisms; psychological mechanisms referred to as Perceived support system (PSS) mechanisms; physio-psychological mechanisms referred to as Affect mechanisms; and socio-economic mechanisms referred to as Exchange Transaction mechanisms and governance structure mechanism; the socio-cultural mechanisms referred to as Employee Value system

(EVS) mechanism and Management Bias system (MBS) mechanism; and institutional mechanism referred to as Isomorphic mechanism. Below I outline the findings of this thesis.

### **5.5.2 Findings**

The sentences (S1-S10) that tell the story of the data are given below and it is from where the findings emerge.

S1) Perceived and experienced TD and RB separately have powers/tendencies to create feelings of motivation, competence, happiness, and job satisfaction of employees and to cause them to increase productivity, be cost-conscious, and loyal to the organisation.

S2) Perceived and experienced SHRP (matched TD + RB) have powers/tendencies to reduce employee turnover, increase productivity and increase OFP.

S3) Managers' perceptions of employees' contributions can lead to recognizing them and relatedness (caring, involving, and accommodating behaviour towards the employee; relatedness is further defined as making the other party feel cared for and carried along.).

S4) Employee properties in the form of employee value system (EVS) can moderate the powers/tendencies of TD/RB due to employees' exchange ideologies.

S5) Unions to whom employees cede their powers tend to increase transaction costs by their activities and that may cause employee-employer relationship failures.

S6) Managers to whom organisations cede their powers tend to influence employee turnover due to their exchange ideologies and activities, and those may cause employee-employer relationship failure.

S7) A set of management bias system (MBS)-influenced HRM strategies (e.g. poaching, forced tenure commitment, and union negotiated agreement) can serve as governance structures used to coordinate employees' behaviours.

S8) The adoption of HRPs by organisations is determined by isomorphic pressures like coercion and mimesis.

S9) TD and RB tend to affect all organisational stakeholders' financial wellbeing.

S10) Petroleum workers, due to perceptions of a risky job, have very high financial expectations which in-turn influence their exchange ideologies and EVS.

By relating and connecting these sentences with and to the research questions and integrated theoretical framework, the findings of this thesis emerge, seven (F1-F7) in number.

F1. Perceived and experienced SHRP tends to be seen to cause employees to be motivated mediated by feelings of competence, confidence, happiness, and job satisfaction.

F2. Affect-ed motivation tends to influence OFP mediated by productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours which could generate increased productivity (PR), SQCES, loyalty (LOY) or affective commitment, employee turnover (TO), and retainership.

F3. Managers' perceptions of employees' contributions can lead to management recognizing them and to relatedness - practices- both of which could escalate or boost the motivational effect of a SHRP perceived and experienced.

F4. A SHRP tends to influence not just the employees but also managers- and clients' agents- behaviours (i.e. it has a multistakeholder effect.).

F5. Eight key HRM mechanisms, namely, Exchange Transaction mechanism, Co-determined mechanism, Affect mechanisms, Perceived support system (PSS) mechanisms, Employee value system (EVS) mechanism and Management Bias system (MBS) mechanism both acting on PSS mechanisms, governance structure mechanisms, and Isomorphic mechanisms, with a host of micro-mechanisms mediate a SHRP and OFP.

F6. EVS can moderate the powers/tendencies of a SHRP due to the employees' exchange ideologies.

F7. A set of MBS-influenced HRM strategies (e.g. poaching, forced tenure commitment, and union negotiated agreement) can serve as governance structures used to coordinate employees' behaviours.

In chapter 6, I discuss the significance of these findings in the context of the research questions and the integrated theoretical framework. Before that, I discuss next how I initiated and received feedbacks about these findings followed by a summary of the chapter.

## **5.6 Feedbacks on the findings**

To check my explanations for 'practical adequacy', to check that 'the explanation seems plausible to an audience that reflects the context of the research', I validated these findings through 'reference back to interviewees' (Oliver 2011). In a bid to share my initial and final findings and obtain their comments, I sent emails to a select number of respondents. These respondents were selected based on my subjective assessment of them as being adequately 'academically educated' and possessing the professional experience to be able to objectively consider the initial findings of the research and put forward their observations and criticisms. I am aware I could be wrong in my assessment. Below are some of the feedbacks on my earlier findings and thoughts.

On my initial suggestion that a person in a social exchange switches between bounded mode and pure self-interested mode contingent on the prevailing conditions in the exchange, feedback received was:

'Propounded theories oftentimes contrast with actual industry practices i.e. 'Employee – Employer' relationships. We need to understand PM [personnel management] (e.g. employee behaviour) and OB [organisational behaviour] from the practical point of view because employees are dynamic and tend to respond positively or negatively to the prevailing affective situation. To use your subtext 'Employees are bounded self-interested based on reciprocity' is a practical fact because every employee aspires for better wage, condition of service, etc. and these demands translate to increase in the overhead cost of the employer. When these benefits are denied, they [employees] become discontented with the organization'.

The insight from the above feedback is that the unpredictability of the employees' RB-related aspirations could translate into increased overhead costs for the employer organization.

On the initial finding that 'Employees respond *generously* to perceived positive contributions or support by their partner – employer - by 'going extra mile' to provide discretionary efforts to the employer and can be *brutal* when they perceive unfair or negative reciprocity behaviours', the feedback was:

'Training and Development practices must be matched with commensurate Rewards and Benefits practices. Note: No matter how committed or generous an employee is, when the RB is not commensurate with the output or productivity, he/she tends to lose focus overtime and will be at the verge of leaving if better offers come. A typical example is the industrial disputes occasioned by energy crises and FG regulations in Nigeria. Consequently, [leading up to] the industrial disputes between worker's unions and industry management. Companies no longer meet up with statutory workers' obligations (payment of salaries/other benefits) and this has led to negative reciprocity behaviours from the employees'.

The feedback above reinforces the belief that matching TD to RB can mitigate employee turnover and could stave off industrial disputes where workers unions could exacerbate the dispute or conflict. FG regulations and workers' unions are viewed as contextual factors affecting HRM transaction costs (Jackson and Schuler 1995: p241).

At this point, it seems difficult to claim I have achieved closure for data collection, but have to close it because this thesis is time delimited and I believe I have identified some important explanatory HRM mechanisms. Next, I summarise this chapter.

## 5.7 Summary

While I allowed data collection not to be framed by the theoretical framework due to its high level abstraction and construct-ladenness but to be guided

by the initial research questions (i.e. the non-theorised version), I framed the data analysis using the theoretical framework in order to deepen it by returning from the concrete to a high level of abstraction. From analysing the data, I found out that even though I initially felt that eight theories had strong implications for HRM-P research, the data reveals more theories than I thought to draw upon and reviewed. Twelve theories were reflected in the data, namely, RBV, Institutional theory, Transaction cost Economics, Self-determination theory, social exchange theory, Organisational support theory, Agency theory, Affect theory, Behavioural perspective, multistakeholder perspective, Resource dependence theory, and Maslow's motivation theory. The last four theories reflected in the data analysis were unanticipated. A plausible explanation for this could be because in collecting data, I did not force particular theories on the data collection process allowing the process to touch many theories. CR affords such flexibility. With the flexibility inherent in the extended framework for data analysis, I have demonstrated a data-analytic triangulation starting with the identification of mechanisms using the GT-type data analysis complemented by a CR-type data analysis and then validating and substantiating the results by framing the data analysis using the integrated theoretical framework. There is a definite advantage. The upshot is that, using the selected research design and the extended GT-CR data analysis framework, the ability of a CR approach to adapt techniques and frameworks and to have theories inform us about reality have been showcased (Danermark *et al.* 2002). It is important to highlight here that the concepts that emerged from the integrated theoretical framework are consistent with those from my methodological framework. This is remarkably so, since these concepts are probably generated by different research

philosophies and methodologies e.g. positivist (quantitative) methodologies than CR - informed qualitative methodology. I argue that neither a positivist-based nor an interpretivist-based research design could have availed us of the potential for arriving at 'enduring' concepts for HRM-P research (Easton 2010) and the identified explanatory HRM-P mechanisms.

While steps 1 to 4, 6 and 8 of the extended framework have been implemented here in chapter 5, steps 5 and 7 have been delayed till chapters 6 and 7 respectively for flow of the narrative. In the discussion chapter, which is next, I attempt to interpret the findings and make sense of the data analysis within the theoretical frames and in the context of the research questions and also discuss the significance of the findings.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

#### 6.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the HRM-P link using an alternative approach to positivist-inspired correlations - the CR approach. It seeks to answer i) if a SHRP causes or influences productivity (PR), employee turnover (TO), and OFP; and ii) If it does, what mechanisms, and other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP. In the last chapter, I implemented the extended data-analytical framework (an integration of the CR data analysis frameworks and GT data analysis techniques) using survey data collected from three case companies in Nigeria's petroleum sector, with one as main case and others substantiating data from the main case company - Wells. Employing GT data Analysis techniques, I used critical coding to derive codes, concepts, and categories. Further, I used the CR data analysis technique or the mechanism approach to identify the objects, social structures, and the mechanisms which may cause employee turnover and other employee and organisational outcomes such as OFP, stimulated by a SHRP comprised of TD and RB. The aim of this chapter is two folds: i) to interpret the findings reported in the previous chapter in the context of the research questions, and attempt an explanation of their significance; and ii) to further discuss the identified explanatory mechanisms which are part of the findings.

The remainder of the chapter is organised as follows: In section 6.2, I detail the discussion of the findings. The process is as follows: I describe each finding

providing data (evidence) and relate it to existing literature, connect it to the integrated theoretical framework (asking whether the empirical finding supports any of the theories reviewed) and research question, and interpret and discuss its significance. For the finding F5 highlighting the identified mechanisms, I continue the discussion started in chapter 5 and show how each mechanism affects the employee, managers, and clients' agents, underscoring how the mechanisms' powers/tendencies could make the human agent feel or do what they do to create improved OFP. I summarize the chapter in section 6.3.

## **6.2 Detailed Discussion of the findings**

Following the numbering of the findings (F1-F7) at the end of chapter 5, I now discuss and interpret the findings.

F1.

In the case of a SHRP's tendency to cause employees to be motivated mediated by feelings of competence, confidence, happiness, and job satisfaction, the finding suggests that perceived and experienced SHRP with the accompanying emotions could motivate employees and other human actors or stakeholders in the system.

Data reveals what precedes motivation given the constituents of a SHRP. Feeling competent and confident post-training with attendant happiness and job satisfaction from previous and present accomplishments motivates employees. Consider this view by a respondent.

Field Engineer: I belong to that school of thought that TD will keep one motivated and happy.....But if I had been trained on this part of the business, I know what to do. when to say yes or to say no..I know when to move and when not to move. What it entails is that during the drilling on well paper meeting I will stand before the client and defend my job and convince them that yes I can do the job and my company is capable of doing this job. When issued the job order, I will mobilize safe equipment to the job site, execute the job professionally, get my ticket signed and my job evaluations rated close to 100 and when I get back to the base, I get my rewards, my field bonus, my salary will be paid, the company will make money, my management will be happy with me, we will get more jobs, as such if there are opportunities to uplift me the company will promote me and make me comfortable, if I am elevated that means if I am on X rate, I will go to X+1 rate which has added to my income. And I think I will be very happy..that's the motivation and I will go home happy. So training has created something. Yes.

The employee's view above shows that feeling precedes motivation. His view is corroborated below by a senior manager who himself was once a field engineer and by the Chief Accountant who believes that money spent on TD and RB not only motivates employees but flows back to the company.

Senior management respondent: Yeah! The training is linked to happiness and satisfaction of staff. First: when you give a staff a responsibility or task to execute, because you have equipped him mentally with the necessary training or know-how needed to carry out that operation, when he goes to the operation he delivers as designed and on time, you find out that he himself will have peace of mind, he will be smiling, he will be happy because he has fulfilled his task without any hitches, without NPT, without incurring unnecessary cost; Internally, that job satisfaction will be there for him because each time he goes no matter how difficult it is you have equipped him knowledge-wise, so he delivers. The moment he finishes his job he is happy.....

Chief Accountant: A staff that goes to the field and is exposed to the torture of weather, climate, or inconveniences being out of home and he comes back and for going out there and you pay him X amount on top of his salary, you find that next time he is willing to go, it motivates that staff, the staff is encouraged, is happy he does the job with satisfaction, feels being cared for, carried along. As the company is growing the personnel is growing, the staff are willing to put in more of their abilities for the company. So RB plays a key role. If a staff is not rewarded he is demoralized, he won't go extra

mile.. When given a benefit he *goes an extra mile* for instance *someone can do beyond his assignment* he *will do more next time he will do more knowing he is never forgotten*. At the end of the day the RB impacts the company. As staff is interested, is not distracted here and there he will put in more.

Though prior SHRM studies argue that a SHRP can be the source of the motivation resulting in employee outcomes such as employee turnover (TO), productivity (PR), loyalty (LOY) or affective commitment (AC), moderated by business strategy with distal outcomes as various performances including OFP (Huselid 1995; Katou 2008), they are not explicit about what mediates a SHRP and motivation. Based on the theoretical frames of the integrated theoretical framework (specifically linked to and supporting OST), perceptions precede motivation. This can be interpreted as perceptions of actor's needs being met or perceptions of experience - the implementation of HRPs - leading to feelings of competence, happiness and job satisfaction. While there has been the debate on what should constitute the components of a SHRP to give it effect and whether and why a SHRP is preferred to isolated HRPs, there has been little or no study on the nature of the interdependent elements of an isolated HRP that gives it effect. Jiang *et al.* (2012) suggested that HRPs can generate in the actor knowledge, skills, motivation, effort, and other contributions. What is not clear is what gives a HRP the causal power to generate these outputs with so large an effect size to substantially influence an OFP. A practice has been defined as consisting of interdependencies between diverse elements including "forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge" (Reckwitz 2002: p249). Since the actors or carriers who encounter these practices are objects with socio-emotional and

economic needs, they may perceive these practices as meeting their basic needs and so get motivated to act, usually self-interestedly.

This finding is significant in that it casts needed light on the intricacies in the most proximal part of the blackbox revealing the connecting elements (perception, experience, feeling competent, confident, happy, and job satisfied) from a SHRP to motivation which most other studies' findings are not explicit about. The exception is Boselie with his colleagues who observed that:

*"....black box studies conceptualise employees' perceptions and experience as the primary mediating variable, and the "signalling" effects of HRM are understood to forge a psychological contract between the employer and employees that shapes these perceptions and experience" (Boselie et al. 2005: p9; cf. Wright and Boswell 2002: p261; Ostroff and Bowen 2000).*

The suggestions by various researchers that HRM systems directly affect first, employees' skills and motivation, then attitudes and behaviours (Pfeffer 1994; Huselid 1995; Becker and Huselid 1998a) can be properly understood on the strength of this finding by deconstructing 'first, employees' skills and motivation'. It can be highlighted that the systems affect first, employees' perception and experience which generate feelings of competence (conceived as 'skills' by these other studies) and then a corresponding emotion-laden motivation.

Given the data, does perceived and experienced SHRP possess the powers/tendencies to cause an employee's motivation? If yes, how do they generate such powers/tendencies? Snippets from above data such as 'I know what to do', 'I do the job and go home happy' indicate employee feeling autonomous, feeling competent and confident and having a 'can-do spirit' which motivate an employee to

act. The snippet 'training has generated something'; benefit makes an employee to 'go an extra mile' indicate the powers of training and RB to tend to cause these feelings and capabilities in the employee.

F2:

In the case of the tendency of the affect-ed motivation influencing OFP mediated by productivity-enhancing and cost-reducing behaviours which in turn could generate productivity (PR), SQCES, loyalty (LOY) or affective commitment, employee turnover (TO), and retainership, the finding suggests that perceived and experienced SHRP influence stakeholders' behaviour patterns contingent on the type and level of motivation or affect generated.

Data reveals how happy, motivated employees who have been trained to know what to do on-the-job and who feel well rewarded after the job, behave (diligent attitude on the job; and timely, error-free executions; etc.) to the benefit of the organization.

A field engineer respondent: If you have a workman you take good care of your workman, your workman will take good care of your business. If you don't really care about the welfare of your workman, the workman may get careless about the welfare of your business.....If you plot your graph properly you find out that you have not gained so much money by not making that workman comfortable but if you pay him his wages as at when due, put some pat on his back, he will go extra miles to ensuring he delivers your job and delivers it properly. We have some incentives rewards and benefits in safety.....You go for a job, do the job successfully, you come back, asides your salary, your company sets aside some bonuses for you to just put smiles on your face, you see the excitement and happiness that is associated with these extra bonuses that people earn. It makes them put in more to make sure they get the job done properly.

Above data reveals reciprocity, in that employees give 'care' for 'care' and 'careless' for 'careless' and may even motivatedly 'go extra mile' for care given. Also, the link between happiness, motivation, and job-related behaviour (up to the result the manager actually wants) is corroborated below by a manager.

Manager: But when a staff is well monitored and rewarded appropriately you will always get the result you want. Often times as long as the personnel knows what to do any tasks assigned is done regularly even before you ask for a result because the staff is always happy with what comes into his pocket at month end. But then also with good rewarding this also leads to a cut down on time wastages, cut down on mistakes during job execution because the staff, if working in the field, carries his dedication fully to the field and does his job with pride.

One of the engineers in the panel interview believes that without motivation there can be no going extra mile. He had this to say when asked to link HRPs to an employee's extra discretionary effort.

Engineer in panel interview: Back to my theory it goes back to motivation. Employee puts in something. If he gets a reward, he will be motivated to put in more. He was able to get a reward without putting more...that's why we call it reward..the employee going the extra mile for the company. I think what is in the gap is motivation. The employee can't go for extra mile without being motivated. The reward must be good enough to keep the employee motivated.

Further, the Chief Accountant believes as stated below that HRPs affect employees' behaviours as without the HRPs lousiness and laziness may set in. Speaking about HRPs, he highlights that 'morally it impacts on the individual'.

Chief Accountant: Accident can be costly. If a driver drives carefully for 6 months he is rewarded. It motivates them to be careful in driving knowing that something is at stake- there is something coming for good job. No one is happy seeing colleagues rewarded and you get nothing so that morally it impacts on the individual. It removes cost which could have eroded company finances. Good work done award: Management can pick out best worker of the month and is rewarded with N100K..that

goes a long way to impact an individual. Without these things workers can be lousy, and lazy; with them losses for the company are reduced. People agitate to be next recipient when they see people being rewarded for good work done.

HRM systems were initially conceived as influencing individual and organisational performances by directly affecting first, employees' skills and motivation, then attitudes and behaviours (Ibid.). Huselid (1995) and Katou (2008) found that a SHRP's influence on OFP is mediated by employee turnover (TO), productivity (PR), loyalty (LOY) or affective commitment (AC). Katou found that the relationship between HRM policies and organisational performance is partially mediated by the skills, attitudes, and behaviours of employees, and it is influenced by business strategies. But these scholars were not explicit about what specifically mediates motivation and the HR and organisational outcomes. Liu (2004), drawing upon social exchange theory and organizational support theory and Allen *et al.* (2003a), found that perceived organizational support (POS) is a link between employee perceptions of HRPs and important organisational outcomes. Drawing from the theoretical frames, the behaviours of human actors and their adaptations in exchange transactions constitute the human agency which draws upon, reproduces and transforms the social structures and is transformed by the social structures. The outputs of such agency are employee and HR outcomes such as increased productivity, SQCES, etc. One of the component theories of the integrated framework - OST - could be joined to this empirical finding F2: Employees who feel cared for, get extrinsically motivated and get more productive through reducing costly behaviours. So, there is evidence based on this finding to support the theory. This finding could be interpreted to mean that human agents, by drawing upon the

HR structures and mechanisms, reproduce (morphostasis) and transform (morphogenesis) the structures but are themselves changed (transformed) – morphogenesis - by the drawing upon. Employees, managers, and clients' agents change their behaviours in ways to affect their own individual performances and commitments and the organisation's performance.

This finding is significant in that it makes more explicit the constituents of the blackbox between a SHRP and OFP. It extends the first finding (F1) highlighting that various human agents' behaviours mediate motivation and the HR and organisational outcomes. But, very importantly, the HRPs determine the behaviours contingent on so many factors that could influence the motivation levels of each employee.

Given the data, does affected-motivation possess the powers/tendencies to influence OPF mediated by behaviours and other HR and organisational outcomes? If yes, how do they generate such powers/tendencies? Putting a 'pat on the back', putting 'smiles on faces' due to 'extras' (bonuses, performance awards, etc.) and cares given to employees, creates excitement and happiness, making employees go extra miles to deliver on their tasks for the employer. Put in another way, giving 'extras' on top of the TD and RB generates powers or drives consequent on employees' perceptions tending to cause them to 'go extra mile'.

F3:

The finding is that managers' perception of employees' contributions tends to lead to their recognizing employees and to relatedness (which means managers

especially and other employees making employees feel they are important members of the team, and feel accepted, among other positive social attitudes. A respondent's phrase - 'feeling cared for and carried along' - depicts relatedness.). Recognition and relatedness could escalate or boost the motivational effect of a perceived and experienced SHRP. The finding suggests that employees' responses to HRPs could in turn impact managers who may respond through practices like relatedness and recognition which have the potential to escalate or further boost the motivational effects in the employee of the SHRP perceived and experienced.

Employee action/attitude can elicit/attract management [re]action. Management perception of employee contribution (PEC) is signaled by recognition and such managers may begin to assign more tasks to such employee thereby improving relatedness. The employee action or attitude was prompted by his/her perception and experiencing of the powers of HRPs. An employee in the security department of Wells had this to say about employees' behaviours attracting management and influencing their behaviours:

Security employee: There was something the Executive Director introduced 2 years ago thereabout. He called it triple A - AAA - Attitude. Attraction. Attention. Your Attitude during work will Attract management (and management is all of us) and then Attention will be given to you and they will compensate you and congratulate you. A supervisor was cultivating the flowers there and his job attracted management and he was rewarded with cash gift and handshake. Others were given commendation letter and N20K. People are being promoted here. The triple A is helpful and taking place here.

An engineer indicates below that employees' perceiving a recognition culture (a system that recognises employees' extra efforts) is healthy for the organisation.

Engineer: In this part of the world here we start work 8am and we close 4pm..if that workman knows that the system is such that it can easily pat you on the back or reward you for extra input..emergencies will come up and you need people's attention because of this practice and you say hey we need you to put in some more time and they will do that comfortably and it (the extra) may not come immediately but they know they are in a system that appreciates people's efforts and if you don't know it could come from anywhere you might receive it verbally or documented or you get somethings.

The powers of RB to change employees have been captured by the Chief accountant who gives an example of how recognition using rewards changes employees and confirms that managements perceive, recognise and respond to HRP-stimulated employee attitudes and behaviours.

Chief Accountant: I will refer you to one of the practices we have here: Safety award. It is given to personnel who have worked without incident or accident. They are rewarded. It gives as much as N7000 per persons who work without Lost time. Drivers are also rewarded for not having accidents.

So far, data reveals that supplemental isolated practices like a recognition culture and a relatedness climate can boost effect sizes of a SHRP. Systems of HRPs with their good internal or horizontal fit, complementing one another or externally fit or vertically integrated, aligned with the organisation's strategy, may not after all (or always) deliver the intended objective. By examining the data collected closely, I analysed 'relatedness' contending that what I refer to as the five components of relatedness, namely social recognition, equity, fidelity, socio-cultural factors, and climate could have impact on the effect size of HRPs e.g. TD and RB. Responding to a question about what could maximize training outcomes, different respondents listed 'social recognition' (see 5-aspects of recognition below); 'socio-cultural factors' which represents 'kinship', 'Cultural affinity' and 'bragging effect'; 'equity' which I use to represent 'equal opportunity'; 'fidelity' which I use to represent 'get his

money when he should'; and 'climate' which I use to describe a 'conducive working environment'. Data further revealed that what I refer to as 'the five dimensions of social recognition' have the potential to boost employees' morale and influence their behaviours. They are: i) 'recognize employee status change, i.e. 'recognize change in competence'; ii) 'recognize employee as valuable'; iii) 'recognize by compensating new status'; iv) 'recognize quality job done'; v) 'recognize consistent standout performers' i.e. 'recognize consistency'. A HR respondent had this to say about recognition:

Once we have trained an employee, we do evaluations annual or quarterly - it is like moving him from a child to an adult and we can see his potentials that the employee can competently handle some tasks. One, you have to recognise the employee Obi is no more a child, you have to treat Obi as a man...you have to promote that person Obi, recognise the person that he is an asset. Such recognition goes a long way, everything is not about money..promotion goes with money when we review the compensation; Two, show appreciation; letters of appreciation for job well done, it boosts morale... We have what we call performance merit allowance for outstanding employees, they are the ones that make things happen. We recognise them. These are the morale boosters.

Relatedness and recognition are practices which management can use to augment a SHRP thereby boosting morale if the organisation is to realise a large effect size. I used the term 'escalation' to describe the influence or impact of the HRP's when management intentionally sustains practices like recognition and other components of relatedness. Examining the components of relatedness and recognition as above and what their powers could be, I further suggest that a sustainable source of extrinsic motivation or what respondents termed 'continuous motivation' of employees, which they claimed could mitigate employee turnover, could be obtained from relatedness climate and recognition culture.

OST (albeit modified to also focus on managers, see chapter 7) could be joined to this empirical finding F3: managers will feel supported upon perceiving substantial employee contributions, get motivated, improve relatedness behaviours and increase HR investments on the contributing employee; employees will in turn perceive the manager's perception of their contributions and raise their contributions to the manager's goals. So, there is evidence based on this finding to support a modified version of OST. Self-determination theory, also one of the theories drawn from in the integrated theoretical framework, identified 'relatedness' as one of the categories alongside feeling competent, and autonomy, that create internal motivation in employees leading to optimal functioning behaviour. Godard (2004) had argued that claims that High performance work systems (a version of a SHRP) 'yield superior performance outcomes when compared with isolated independent practices may be unwarranted noting that they found conventional explanations for these findings to be insufficient.

This important unanticipated finding is significant in two ways. First, it signals that an actor's perception and experience may not totally be responsible for her/his motivation and the effect we see. Going by this finding that managers may be attracted to respond to employees' behaviours, I contend that the actions or responses of other actors or stakeholders are critically contributory to the effects and effect-sizes of the HRPs enacted and perceived. Second, the idea (see literature review chapter 2) that isolated practices are not as efficacious as a system of practices may be unwarranted given this findings' insight that accompanying

practices, or rather a context - a culture and climate of recognition and relatedness - may be more critical.

Given the data, a manager's perception of an employee's contribution leading to relatedness and recognition possesses the powers/tendencies to boost or escalate the employee's motivation. The powers/tendencies are generated through the various dimensions of relatedness and recognition which serve as tonic to boost employees' positive behaviours. In a way, relatedness and recognition have the nature of 'the extras' usually given to employees with their strong or high-level motivational effects as explained in the finding F2.

F4:

The finding that a SHRP tends to influence not just the employees but also managers- and clients' agents- behaviours suggests the emergence of its effects (i.e. the effect is not exactly equal to a sum of its parts) and the multi-path of its influence. In other words, it has a multistakeholder effect.

The finding further suggests that multiple stakeholders are influenced by a SHRP and combine to influence the outcomes or decisions in an organisation. In a workplace exchange relationship, all stakeholders, not just employees, receive and give support. A stakeholder has been defined as 'any group that can affect or is affected by the achievement of organizational goals and objectives' (Way and Johnson 2005; cf. Freeman 1984). An engineer suggested that training him to do his job well impacts his financial wellbeing and those of the company. The Chief

Accountant also below put proper value on training investment and how it rubs off on the employee and company.

Engineer: When issued the job order, I will mobilize safe equipment to the job site, execute the job professionally, get my ticket signed and my job evaluations rated close to 100 and when I get back to the base, I get my rewards, my field bonus, my salary will be paid, the company will make money, my management will be happy with me, we will get more jobs,.....

Chief Accountant: If company sent a staff overseas for what we call downhole training, by the time that person who was, say a helper/operator (on whom we used to charge the client say 200 dollars a day) comes back as trained downhole specialist his rate goes up to say 800 to 1000 dollars a day. You can see the margin. So within a short time you recoup what you have invested and what you spent on the staff. Not only that the company gains but the staff is exposed, and happy. The company has exposure as well to areas of speciality they were not exposed to before the training.

The above could be interpreted to mean that specialised training could give up to 400% of employee value and that given there is short lead time on training investment, training benefits both company and employee. The General manager responding about the multi-stakeholder effect of training, made reference to how even the client benefits from training investment also linking training to the financial performance of the company.

General manager: .....you find out that for every trained engineer or operator the financial implication compared to the cost of training to his performance is a chicken feed you spend in the training...each well they work on costs 7 to 10 million dollars depending on onshore or offshore, some cost more up to 30M dollars if deep offshore which we are involved in, But when you train them and they deliver the services as at when due and at cheaper price the client will be happy and you as service provider will be assured of continued job, the client will always call you as you give needed service delivery. So there is a strong relationship between training of staff and financial performance, not just for you but for your client and also the environment. Remember that you are also working in a community if you don't train your personnel if you enter into the trouble of oil spill you know how much it takes you to come out of

that. Infact, the issue of the relationship between training and financial performance is a very big subject, and we can never stop analysing it.'

Systems theory (Ackoff 1974; Buckley 1967), 'the underlying theory behind the integration of a multiple stakeholder perspective in SHRM research emphasizes that organizations are open systems rather than independent ones requiring the support of all (i.e., both external and internal) stakeholders in order to successfully address relevant organizational issues and problems' (Way and Johnson 2005; cf. Freeman and MCVea 2001). The received knowledge in most Organisational Behaviour and HR literature and practice is that in a workplace exchange relationship, only one of the parties - the employee - receives support from the other – the employer organisation. This gives the erroneous impression that organisations do not need support or do not get supported by employees. Researchers may even know that this is not the case but carry on in their research focus as if focusing on the other stakeholders' perceptions and experience and their agents is not also important. Predominantly, researchers have, drawing upon existing theories, focused on the motivation of employees and their emotions. There is little or no research that has focused on how other stakeholders in the workplace, especially agents of organisations (managers) can be motivated so as to achieve organisational performance. An encouraging exception are researchers led by Boselie, Brewster and Paauwe who have promoted the 'Contextual HR theory' which sought to expand the context of who exactly are stakeholders in organisations and how performance may be defined (Boselie *et al.* 2009). Sole focus of most organisational theories on the employees as human agents (located at the employee level) neglecting the other human agents in the HRM system (e.g. principals and

managers at organisational level; and client-agent at client level) as contributors to the effects or outcomes has received criticism from these scholars leading to a growing use of multi-level methods as a powerful method for understanding the nature of organisations (Boselie *et al.* 2005; cf. Klein and Kozlowski 2000b). Their methodology which recommends 'multi-level and multi-actor research' expects the effects of HRP to reach society and other stakeholders as well as the shareholders and the employees (Ibid.). The evidence supporting this kind of research and recommendation has been provided by the above respondent data and in this finding F4. Even though, in general, the integrated theoretical framework addresses this empirical finding, particularly, a modified version of OST where managers, and not only employees, are included in the focus could be joined to this finding.

This finding is significant in five ways: i) It attempts to, along with the other findings, answer the 'who' and 'why' questions raised by (Wright *et al.* 2001) who observed that:

"...the strategy literature has generated significant amounts of knowledge regarding who (i.e., employees/executives or groups of employees/executives) provides sources of competitive advantage and why. However, absent from that literature is specific techniques for attracting, developing, motivating, maintaining, or retaining these people. SHRM, on the other hand has generated knowledge regarding the attraction, development, motivation, maintenance, and retention of people. However, it has not been particularly successful yet at identifying who the focus of these systems should be on and why." (Wright *et al.* 2001)

ii) It strengthens the concern of single level analysis as methodological limitation. Single-level analysis in HRM-P link studies means that organisational processes have not been well analysed and understood and the source of contributions and influence path to Organisational performance are not properly analysed. This partly

feeds the problem of HRM-P blackbox; iii) it gives insight that employees' attitudes and behaviours after perceiving a SHRP affects the decisions of managers suggesting there is a feature of reverse-causality in the HRM-P relationship, iv) It therefore highlights the inter-dynamics of social and cultural relations between employees and employers as part of a co-evolving relationship. This area needs further research as 'the role of the immediate line manager or supervisor in the actual enactment process is an undeveloped area' (Purcell *et al.* 2003) and finally, v) It gives insight into the dynamics of the formation or shaping of stakeholders' perceptions and experiences and the nature of the so-called HRM-P blackbox. Further research can also focus on what motivates managers and leaders and why, and explore which stakeholder should receive the greatest attention and why when it comes to motivating them towards achieving the set organisational goals.

Given the data, does perceived and experienced SHRP possess the powers/tendencies to cause multistakeholder effects? If yes, how do they generate such powers/tendencies? A SHRP possesses the powers/tendencies to stimulate perception and emotion in the employee leading to influence on his/her behaviours. Since the employee and the employer's agent on one hand and the employer and client on the other are in internal relations, the human actors across organisational levels perceive what the others are doing (behaviours) which influences their own behaviours (i.e. they react), and given the open-systemic nature of the organisation, a SHRP influences more than just the employee and does so through multiple influence paths.

F5:

The finding that eight HRM mechanisms, namely, Exchange Transaction mechanism, Co-determined mechanism, Affect mechanisms, Perceived support system (PSS) mechanisms, Employee value system (EVS) mechanism, Management Bias system (MBS) mechanism, Governance structure mechanism, and Isomorphic mechanism and a host of micro-mechanisms mediate a SHRP and OFP, suggests the causal tendency of a SHRP owing to its causal powers.

Identification of these mechanisms with evidence and the discussions about them started in chapter 5 and is summarized here. The Exchange transaction mechanism's powers/tendencies could be activated when an employee exhibits a training-induced cost-reducing behaviour in a transactional (socioeconomic) effort to create improved employee performance thereby leading to OFP. Whether its powers are actualized is contingent on other mechanisms it interpenetrates and combines with. The powers/tendencies of PSS mechanisms could be activated when a SHRP acting on employees' perceptual attributes stimulates and reinforces employee behaviours. Their powers' actualization is contingent because it interpenetrates and combines with other mechanisms especially Affect, EVS, and MBS. The powers/tendencies of Affect mechanisms could be activated by emotions evoked first by stimulated employees and by other human actors in the PINES superstructure. They link perception to behaviour through moderating the motivation levels of organisational stakeholders, whether employees or employers' agents, or clients' agents. Feelings of autonomy and growth, being recognized and involved, and cared for as a result of experiencing a SHRP could trigger a Co-determined mechanism which possesses powers/tendencies to generate employee

optimal functioning in intrinsically motivated employees. EVS mechanism possesses powers/tendencies based on employees' inner psychologies to moderate the values attached to the perceptions by employees of the SHRP and their expectations. MBS mechanism possesses powers/tendencies based on managers' biases and ideologies to moderate the perceptions by managers of employees' contributions and the policies/strategies and governance structures they apply towards HRM. The governance structure mechanism possesses powers/tendencies to coordinate employees' behaviour with the goal of increasing OFP. Contracts and other forms of agreements, which are forms or elements of governance structures, constrain actors' behaviours towards organisational objectives e.g. cost-reduction. The power/tendency of Isomorphic mechanism when activated generates institutional pressures on the employer organisation leading to their conforming or survivalist disposition. It applies isomorphic pressures (coercive or mimetic) on employees, influencing them to behave in certain (considered 'normal' and therefore 'acceptable') ways.

This finding is significant in that it, apart from suggesting that a SHRP tends to cause OFP, throws some much needed light on what mechanisms could generate the various outcomes in an HRM-P 'blackbox' contingent on other active contextual mechanisms which may exist even if yet unidentified.

Each of the constitutive theories of the integrated theoretical framework could be joined to this empirical finding F5. So, there is evidence based on this finding to support them. Other theories not reviewed specifically seem active in the system and evidenced by data. For example, though related to the OST, the Affect

theory of social exchange 'includes emotion as part of the exchange processes and identifies how individuals attribute their emotions to different social units (exchange partners, groups) which attribution leads to behaviour changes (Lawler 2001). Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) view emotion as a functional part of the workplace and a complement to reason. They outline 'affect' as being composed of both 'mood' and 'emotions' and argue for the complementary function of emotionality and rationality as against the often pejorative view of emotions as 'the dysfunctional antithesis of rationality' (ibid.). Employees release emotions in response to the enabling condition of feeling supported or equipped through training. Respondents often spoke about smiling, being happy or satisfied, and being motivated because of feeling supported or equipped to carry out their tasks.

In explaining the working of these mechanisms, I suppose that PSS lies at the lowest stratum. PSS generates perceptual signals to the mechanisms in the stratum above it – the Affect mechanism generating emotions which drive behaviour and combining with the Co-determined mechanism which guides employees' autonomous and heteronomous functioning. These mechanisms interpenetrate and combine with the Exchange Transaction and Governance structure mechanisms in the stratum above them ordering the behaviours of human agents in the exchange processes. I have assumed that the Exchange Transaction mechanism is antecedent with respect to the other mechanisms, more so that it initiates the starting processes for PINES. The other mechanisms seem to feedback or reinforce the Exchange Transaction mechanism and themselves. The EVS and MBS mechanisms moderate the PSS and Affect mechanisms wherever they exist while the Isomorphic

mechanism is moderated by the MBS as well. The operations of these mechanisms in an open system like PINES as evidenced in data and as discussed in sub-sub section 5.3.1.1 and above lead me to make the causality claim which is: A SHRP tends to cause OFP mediated by HR and organisational outcomes.

I want to recap at this stage discussions on the findings. I have so far shown that moderated perceptions and emotion expressions (e.g. motivations, grumblings, etc.) are behind the organisational stakeholders' attitudes and behaviours. Finding F4 above specifies a spatio-temporal relationship and a multi-path for the influence of SHRP on various outcomes, including OFP. Aside, therefore, from the employees' perceptions and beliefs about the SHRP, the perceptions and beliefs of managers and supervisors (agents of the employer), and the clients' agents are suggested by this thesis (see finding F4 and Fig. 13 below) to influence the various outcomes. Consequently, distinct perceived supports have been suggested to exist at different levels in the organisation (see chapter 2 above), not just immediately consequent on SHRP at the employee-employer level alone. It is also suggested that emotion expression (affect) is an explicit outcome consequent on (or co-existent with) the distinct perceived support. To illustrate the operation of the eight mechanisms, I use what I refer to as the 6E model (because the diagram looks like sketching '6E') of HRM mechanisms in Fig. 13 below. An exchange transaction mechanism connects the three parties (employee, employer organisation, and client organisation) in internal relations. Each of the parties perceives through the PSS mechanism (moderated by EVS and MBS mechanisms) either 'support' (employee), or 'effort' (employer organisation), or 'retainership' (employer organisation) or 'services' (client

organisation) generated by the relating partner as in the figure. Affect mechanisms combine with PSS to trigger whatever the human actors do. Whatever the employees do is influenced by the operation of the Co-determined mechanism in its combination with the PSS and Affect mechanisms. The Isomorphic and governance structure mechanisms operate in the relationship between the employees and the employer organisation. Fig. 13 attempts to capture via a 2-dimensional diagram the very complex interpenetration/combination, or what some writers call the 'multimesh', of the eight HRM mechanisms. Also, drawing from the frames of the integrated theoretical framework, emotion and its antecedent - perception - drive the attitudes and behaviours of humans in the exchange transaction.

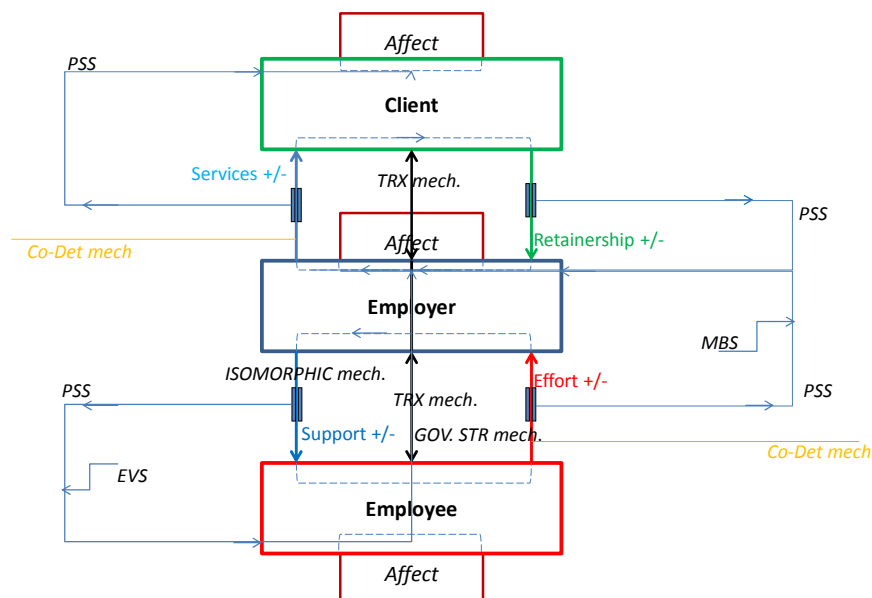


Fig: 13 6E Model of HRM Mechanisms

The findings so far (F1 to F5) seem to be partially contradicted by prior research by suggesting that, aside the perceptions and beliefs of employees, there are other perceptions and beliefs e.g. those held by managers and clients' representatives,

which are also mediating factors. Extant literature's account that the employee's perceptions and experience are the primary mediating variable in the HRM-P relationship (Boselie *et al.* 2005: p9; cf. Wright and Boswell 2002: p261; Ostroff and Bowen 2000). Allen *et al.* (2003a) and Liu (2004) focused on the temporal relationship between perception and emotion in an organisation. They found that perceived organisational support (POS) alone, though with some moderating factors, through a single - path influence, mediates SHRP and other HR outcomes. Some other researchers found POS moderated by other factors such as age, tenure, etc. as mediating a SHRP and various employee and organisational outcomes (Eisenberger *et al.* 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002; Liu 2004). The interpretation I give to these in view of these findings discussed here so far is that Affect and PSS mechanisms connect with HR outcomes and can be conceived as what Liu (2004) referred to as 'the motivational basis behind' stakeholders' attitudes and behaviors in organizations. The other mechanisms acting in combination with them and interpenetrating one another generate the outcomes. As I am yet to find a study espousing a distinct HRM-P mechanism (except closely by Dirpal G. 2015) or the moderating mechanisms generating HR and organisational outcomes, this finding is therefore not entirely consistent with the findings and results of prior research.

An explanation for the contradiction or difference could come from the influence on SHRM of the Resource Based View (RBV) whose sole focus on employees – the organisation's 'human resource'- assumes that employees are a firm's strategic asset and can be configured to be a basis for having competitive advantage, and from the behavioural perspective of HRM with its assumption that

HRPs are employed to control the behaviour and attitudes of employees. Combined, these theories placed much emphasis on 'skills and motivation and organisational structures' as motivational force behind employees' attitudes and behaviours. For, especially the POS-based studies, difference could partly be because the components of the SHRP used for the different studies are not the same (issue of inconsistency) and the research approaches differ. I discuss findings F6 to F7 next.

F6:

The finding that EVS can moderate the powers/tendencies of a SHRP due to the employees' exchange ideologies suggests that individual employee psychological (inner) traits - who one is - influence the value weight placed on their perceptions and the kind of expectations when they experience the HRPs.

Employee values are conceptualized as the internal pressure on employees' behaviours in response to HRPs perceived and experienced. Concerning employee values, a respondent suggests how one's core values drive decisions and motivation:

Panel respondent: It can and it cannot. Motivation is beyond TD in my view. Motivation is from your key components in life. I am someone who likes to do things with my hand and because that is what gives me joy/hobby, and so I may need training to keep at my hobby and even when the training is not coming, because I am motivated I look for ways to train myself. Training will support your motivation in that way. If you are someone who is looking for reward, training might not generate motivation for you...he wants you to send him to rig to make more money and so is not interested in training..I need rig time to get money...so what is your core value. This determines what motivates you.

Self-determination theory could be joined to the empirical finding F6: Employees' inner psychological traits influence their values and then the weight attached to their perceptions, determining the motivation level due to and the effect of experiencing

a SHRP. There is evidence based on this finding to support the theory. Snippets like 'I am someone who likes to do things with my hands...that is what gives me joy..'; 'If you are someone who is looking for reward..', indicate the power one's value system has over perception and affect level. The values one holds affects the value placed on effects of (powers of) training or RB perceived and experienced. Given the data, who employees really are, their innate psychologies affect their ideologies which possess the powers/tendencies to moderate the powers/tendencies of a SHRP.

F7:

The finding that a set of MBS-influenced HRM strategies (e.g. poaching, forced tenure commitment, and union negotiated agreement) can serve as governance structures used to coordinate employees' behaviours suggests that a causal mechanism – governance structure – exists that exerts a double influence or internal pressure upon the human actors in the employee-employer internal relation. Management biases and beliefs internally pressurises the decisions organisations make about how to manage employees (HRM) and the HR function. This is the first influence/pressure. The pressurised management in turn contrives governance structures to influence/pressure employees' decisions and behaviours, the second influence/pressure.

Data reveals that while employees open themselves up for 'poaching', organisations, as a strategy, poach well-trained employees of their competitor.

Question: .....Considering the intangible thing you said you desired, if that thing wasn't handled it could make you leave the company?

Management respondent: Yes. Let me be honest. Immediately I came back from that course I was handling a job at Kokori and a company tried to penetrate to investigate me to hire me.

Question: How do you resolve this challenge (poaching)?

HR respondent: When we started having this problem of poaching of our staff, we came up with a policy. Every new employee especially trainee must sign a commitment. Max number of years of training of 2 to 3 years and after that you work with the Company for minimum of 5 years.

Question: Did they sign? Did they stay?

HR respondent: If you don't stay you lose your entitlement because you signed it.

The above data shows that the organisation reacted to the poaching incidence with a governance structure to mitigate it – the forced tenure commitment strategy. Organisations create explicit or implicit poached talent contracts and forced tenure contracts through which they influence the behaviours of the employees involved, e.g. tenureship, loyalty, productivity, etc. Well's management (as in the data above) used 'forced tenure commitment' as a governance structure (a mechanism) binding to the organisation employees with firm-specific skills who might attempt opportunistic behaviours like opening themselves up for poaching after undergoing specialized training creating thereby some kind of internal labour market. Organizations that do not require firm-specific skills strive to gain efficiencies by 'competing for self-interested and boundedly rational talent in an external labor market' (see Williamson 1981, 1992; Jackson and Schuler 1995: p242-3). Governance structures designed to utilize poaching and forced tenure commitments can optimize or economize transactional costs related to employee contracts.

Theoretically framing this discussion, governance structures are constitutive part of the social structure which human agency draws upon, reproduces and

transforms and which reproduces agency. This finding agrees with one of the conjectures made in chapter 2 which posits that to be efficacious, a SHRP must be linked with governance structures and fused with human relationships. Institutional (Isomorphic) and Transactional Cost theories could be joined to the empirical finding F7: Employers feeling pressures including competitive pressures, will respond by putting up governance strategies which infuse order and mitigate losses, while sustaining transactional contracts with employees and clients. Employees feeling isomorphic pressures to conform in the organisation and with regard to their contract, start to imbibe behaviours aligned to the organisation's goal. There is evidence based on this finding to support these theories.

This finding is significant because it gives insight to the place of governance structures design in HRM, how linking them to HRPs could augment or make efficacious the HRPs and guide agents' or actors' behaviours (agency). Managements can design employee contracts incorporating the amount of RB and TD investments based on whether the employee is a poached talent, a forced tenure employee, or a negotiated-agreed contract employee. This insight complements the finding above that dimensions of recognition and relatedness can be used to impact the effect size of TD and RB practices.

Given the data, do governance structures possess the powers/tendencies to influence and coordinate employees' behaviours? If yes, how do they generate such powers/tendencies? Governance structures possess the powers/tendencies to regulate or coordinate employees' behaviour owing to their contractual imperatives and given that in the power imbalance in such contracts, the employer organisation

has the upper hand. From the data cited last above, it can be inferred that the employer decided to institute a tenure minimum of 5 years without seeking the consent of the employee or even the Union.

Being a thesis with time-delimited cross-sectional design, the findings (F1 to F7), though reliable and supported by data, should be used cautiously bearing in mind the limitations of the research which I discuss in chapter 7. I summarize the chapter next.

### **6.3 Summary**

Except Cappelli and Neumark (2001) who report 'an empirical exception' and Godard (2004) who have 'a less optimistic review', most empirical work in HRM-P generally report the same finding: 'the choice of HR practices is related to business performance, often strongly'... and 'in most empirical studies, HR and performance were positively related' (Gerhart 2005: p175). The summation of the findings of this thesis would read like this: Mediating a SHRP and motivation are the perceptions and experiences of the practices by all the human actors with the accompanying emotions. Policies, and practices like relatedness and recognition within the organisational culture, could boost motivation. Mediating motivation and actors' behaviours are combining and interpenetrating causal mechanisms which link a SHRP to the actors' behaviours and then to OFP. Institutional and political forces including Isomorphic pressures, management's biases, and employee's values moderate the actors' behaviours. Mediating human actors' behaviours and OFP are the various forms of governance structures designed by management and other self-protecting adaptations by employees and other stakeholders. Aware of the

importance of the nature of interacting objects (including their types or kinds) and their powers/tendencies, how an employee's values and personal traits, a manager's beliefs and biases, one's profession (e.g. petroleum or IT worker), and jurisdiction (e.g. UK-based or Nigeria-based organisation) influence their perceptions and emotions when they interact with the HRPs could determine the outcomes produced.

The findings suggest that although several mechanisms associated with these objects in interplay are at work in the HRM-P phenomenon, only the distinct mechanisms described here, namely PSS mechanisms, Affect mechanisms, Exchange Transaction mechanisms, Co-determined mechanism, EVS mechanism, MBS mechanism, Governance structure mechanism, and Isomorphic mechanism are salient and consistent with the data.

Out of 12 distinct mechanisms conjectured in chapter 2 as indicated by the five component theories of the integrated theoretical framework, explicit evidence was provided by data for 8 of them as outlined above. While I explicitly have no evidence in the data collected for 'VRIN-ranked value creating strategy mechanism' and 'Profit-maximization mechanism' which emerged from RBV and TCE respectively, the identification of Cost-reduction micro-mechanism as part of the Exchange transaction mechanism is, in my judgment, implicit reference to both. Cost-reduction micro-mechanism is supported by data snippets like targeting 'Safe quality cost effective services (SQCES)' and the reduction of non-productive time (NPT) as value-creating strategy, ideas the General Manager of Wells stressed upon. Insisting on SQCES is Well's strategy for creating and sustaining its competitive advantage and

retaining her contracts. There is also no explicit evidence for a key moderating mechanism called 'corporate strategy' as contextual mechanism or what other researchers have termed the moderation of business strategy'. But its moderating effect comes into effect in micro-mechanisms constituting MBS and Governance structure mechanisms. Institutional mechanism is accounted for by Isomorphic mechanism.

When the right conditions manifest, the identified causal mechanisms triggered by a SHRP may generate various HR and organisational outcomes including OFP.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

#### 7.1 Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to understand the HRM-P link using another approach - the CR approach. The research problem is the issue of 'inconclusive evidence' in the claims by researchers of the existence of a causal link between HR practices and OFP. This problem led me to posing the research questions which were grouped as the link question and the HRM-P 'blackbox' question. They are:

A) Is a SHRP causally linked to OFP?

B) If it is, what mechanisms, and other mediating and moderating factors lie between a SHRP and OFP?

The research design chosen was a descriptive and interpretive cross-sectional case study analysed using qualitative methods. I operationalised an extended framework using survey data collected from three service companies in Nigeria's petroleum sector, with one (Wells) as main case and others substantiating the data from the main case company. Data trips were undertaken until I deemed sufficient closure had been reached. Employing GT data Analysis techniques, I used coding to derive codes, concepts, and categories. Further, I used CR data analysis technique or the mechanism approach to identify the objects, social structures, and key mechanisms which may (or may not) cause the event of employee turnover or OFP stimulated by a SHRP constituted of TD and RB. I framed the data analysis (in fact the whole research process) with the integrated theoretical framework.

In the last chapter, the findings of this thesis were interpreted and discussed and an attempt made to explain the findings in the context of the research questions. My experience in the petroleum industry was used in some cases to substantiate data or interpret the findings. The aims of this concluding chapter are to draw conclusions from the findings with respect to the research questions, placing them in larger context of the HRM-P literature; to indicate potential contributions of the thesis while noting the thesis' limitations, and to suggest future research directions.

The remainder of this chapter is therefore divided as follows: In section 7.2, I answer the above listed research questions based on the findings. I discuss the contributions of the findings to SHRM, OST-POS, and OB literature and to theory in section 7.3. In section 7.4, I discuss the implications to managerial practice and suggest future research directions in section 7.5. The limitations of the findings are outlined in section 7.6 followed by my reflections and concluding statements in section 7.7.

## **7.2 Answers to the research questions**

**In answering the first research question**, I state as follows: There indeed is a causal relationship between a SHRP and OFP. A SHRP tends to cause OFP mediated by at least eight key mechanisms and HR and organisational outcomes.

A SHRP causal link to OFP is further suggested by the finding that socio-economic mechanisms (Exchange Transaction mechanism), a socio-psychological mechanism (Co-determined mechanism), physio-psychological mechanisms (Affect

mechanisms), Governance structure mechanism, and psychological mechanisms (PSS mechanisms) interact, interpenetrate, and combine to connect a SHRP to OFP through various HR outcomes moderated by three other key mechanisms - EVS, MBS, and Isomorphic pressures. But other studies differ.

Boselie and colleagues citing Godard (2004) argued that claims that 'High performance work systems yield superior performance outcomes may be unwarranted' (Boselie *et al.* 2005). The claimed HRM link to OFP is 'at best an assumption' (Ibid.). Wall and Wood (2005) and Boselie *et al.* (2005) contend that there is no convincing proof yet of a causal link but argue that there is an association between a SHRP and OFP. Other scholars posit that the claim of evidence of association between a SHRP and OFP cannot be translated into a causation (Guest 2011; cf. Boselie *et al.* 2005; Combs *et al.* 2006a). Gerhart (2005) commenting on causality stated as follows:

'Although there is evidence to suggest that HR is related to business performance, there is almost no evidence to document that the causal relationship is of the form HR -> business performance rather than some other causal form. In 1996, Becker and Gerhart stated that "Future work...must elaborate on the black box between a firm's HR system and the firm's bottom line" (793). This has not happened. Without evidence on intervening/mediating variables, the specific causal model remains unclear'.

The scholars referred to above seem to argue that there is no proof for causality in HRM-P because they reference simple causality while I argue that the approach used in this thesis can even go beyond and provide proof for complex causality (I refer the reader to the difference between simple and complex causality, as discussed in chapter 2. The caveat though is that because the findings cannot be

generalized since it was not possible to collect longitudinal data due to time constraints, users of the findings should be cautious.

**In answering the second research question,** I state as follows: Mediating a SHRP and Motivation are perceptions and experiences of human actors leading to emotions, with isolated independent practices like relatedness and recognition boosting motivation and effect sizes. Mediating motivation and actors' behaviours are governance structures which influence actors' behaviours with behaviour-enhancing practices like 'going an extra mile' and moderating factors like institutional and political forces, etc. Mediating human actors' behaviours and OFP are the various forms of adaptation by management and other stakeholders. Since a causal link exists between a SHRP and OFP as argued above, the nature of the link is captured by the finding that the eight distinct mechanisms connect a SHRP to various HR and organisational outcomes and the finding that they exist at several different emergent levels in the organisation. This means that a SHRP has a multi-path influence which is explained by (or due to) the finding that all stakeholders impacted by its causal powers at different levels in the organisation contribute to its effects. A SHRP is escalating, 'path-dependent', and 'causally ambiguous' and might be difficult to imitate.

The foregoing statements clarify the nature of the HRM-P blackbox having highlighted the antecedents, consequents, and mediators. I believe that by being able to address the research questions, this thesis has potential contributions to make to HRM literature and to theory which I now discuss.

### **7.3 Potential contributions**

I have classified the potential contributions of this thesis to literature into contributions to SHRM-OST-POS literature, and Organisational behavior (OB) literature. I have also attempted to write as part of the contribution in keeping with the steps of the extended framework, a modification to theory.

### **7.3.1 Contribution to Literature**

#### **7.3.1.1 Contribution to SHRM and OST-POS literature**

*Who should SHRM research focus on and why?*

The role of social relationships in the SHRM and Organisational behavior literature has hitherto not been adequately researched (Liu 2004; Uhl-Bien *et al.* 2000) especially with emphasis on multi-level analysis covering all organisational stakeholders. The finding that implied that every stakeholder's perception and experiences and actions are emergently contributory and generative to OFP through distinct perceived support(s) and affects accounts for the causal powers of the internal relations that stakeholders enter into in the organisation. Analysing extensively the role of the social exchange relationship in SHRM as this thesis tried to do is critically important because it helps us understand who the focus should be on and why. It crystallizes the multi-path influence of a SHRP.

*Unravelling the HRM blackbox*

A major debate in HRM-P has been on how best to illuminate the so-called 'black box'. Related to this, researchers have also been interested to unravel the complications in the POS-Organisational outcome link and especially understand the mediating mechanisms (Liu 2004: p81-2). The finding that a group of interpenetrating HRM mechanisms among them PSS and Affect mechanisms mediate

SHRP-OFP and the suggestion that distinct mechanisms exist at different emergent levels in the organisation both throw some much needed light on the constituents of the HRM-P 'blackbox' and indicate a multi-path, not a single-path, for the influence of SHRP on OFP. These findings contribute to the SHRM-POS literature by revealing some of the mediating mechanisms between POS and employee attitudes and behaviours showing that it is more complex than prior research (mostly quantitative based) modelled. While researchers like Liu see factors such as 'professional commitment' as interacting with POS, this research found that distinct mechanisms - EVS and MBS - interact with not just POS but other perceptual components at other organisational levels e.g. perceived employee contribution (PEC) in determining outcomes.

### **7.3.1.2 Contribution to OB literature**

#### *Enriching understanding of OB*

The OB perspective has been interested in understanding employees' attitudes and behaviours in the face of HRPs and the way organisations manage these employees to achieve their goals (Pfeffer 2007). The identification of the EVS mechanism in the empirical finding adds to the literature on 'individual cognitive bias and its implications for human judgment and decision making' (Ibid.; cf. Kahneman and Tversky 1979), while the identification of the MBS mechanism in the empirical finding and the dynamics of the poaching concept add to the 'more macro-level theories of organizational bias and irrationality' (Ibid.). Exploring the operation of these mechanisms and the concept through further research can enrich our

understanding of organisational and employee behaviours especially with respect to the implementation of various HRPs.

### **7.3.2 Modifying existing theory**

*Organisational Support Theory (OST): One perspective, one stakeholder, one rule*

This thesis has exposed OST's faulty assumptions that in social exchange relationships in organisations, actions and decisions are based on perceptions alone; only employees' perceptions are focused on and analysed in such relationships in organisations; that the response strategy to perception is based on the norm of reciprocity rule alone; and that only employees need or use support – implying that organisations and clients do not seem to need or use support by employees.

OST is based on the reciprocity rule. This theory failed to capture the starting mechanisms and the stabilizing mechanisms in socio-economic exchanges and in transactions between employees and employer organisations respectively. Assuming a reciprocity rule solely creates a loss of information about some types of agential behaviours and the dynamics of the formation of employee's perceptions. Concerning the dynamics of the formation of employee's perception, little things matter. Focusing on antecedents or consequents as most prior research do (see Liu 2004) while neglecting the little things might create a problem of analysis. 'Individual differences' (Ibid.), 'professional commitment' (Ibid.), incremental investments or 'interstimulations' (Bardis 1979: p148), add-ons like bonuses and incentives, and response timing may seem small issues but they matter and influence employees' (and other stakeholders') perceptions of HRPs and by extension the perceptions of organisational support (Ibid.) in a big way. Response strategy and response timing -

delay in responding, delay in making incremental investments, and delay in matching TD with appropriate RB - are specific issues organisations should pay attention to. Organisations may suffer the loss of their entire HR investment where they neglect to place or time these properly. Like context, these factors/issues play big roles in determining the outcomes of the mechanisms acting.

The insight given by the implication of the findings in this thesis is that the researcher should not only be concerned about the starting mechanisms but also pay attention to stabilizing mechanisms and should not focus solely on the reciprocity rule. The import of this contribution is that OST needs modification if it is to be a robust underpinning theory for SHRM research.

I propose revised assumptions and alternative descriptions for a modified OST. The underlying assumptions of a modified OST theory should be:

- i) A pluralist approach which acknowledges that in the workplace, employers and employees sometimes have differing interests which could lead to working at cross-purposes. The implication of this approach is that management will need to negotiate and resolve these interests, some of them emotional, if organisational goals are to be met. The counter approach, the unitarists believe that organisational stakeholders, particularly employees and employers, have common interests – an approach Moore and Gardner called a ‘useful fiction’ which serves to downplay real life difficulties the manager faces in the workplace in resolving and balancing interests and emotions (Radcliffe 2005; cf. Moore and Gardner 2004).
- ii) All stakeholders are impacted by the SHRP and HR policies of the organization.
- iii) All stakeholders in social exchange relationships receive and give supports.

iv) The rule for social exchange is a mixed rule involving reciprocity, competition, cooperation, and rivalry.

The theory should describe more fully the social exchange relationship between internally-relating stakeholders in the organization, the basis of stakeholders' interactions, the response strategies, and the organisational investment or performance strategies. The modified OST should refer to stakeholders' perceptions about the degree to which social partners support their greatest goals and interests. It should argue that perception and emotional expressions play important roles in organisational social relationships; that a layer of mechanisms is the motivational basis behind employee and organisational performance. I discuss the managerial implications of the major findings next.

#### **7.4 Implications for managerial practice**

A SHRP is causally linked to OFP with eight key mediating HRM mechanisms influencing outcomes. The implications for HRM practice are: that for effective and efficient management, organisations must, in view of the nature of the constituents of a SHRP, do a proper differentiation of the constituents to ascertain which to invest in more to maximize effect size; that by the nature of human actors, little things and changes do influence the dynamics of perception formation and human emotion so that careful design of and modification of governance structures could maximize effect sizes of HRPs; and that owing to the multistakeholder impact of HRPs, there are cost implications for decisions of who among the human actors organisations invest in. I explicate on these points below.

1). Given the finding that a SHRP tends to cause OFP with motivation as a proximal mediator coupled with the finding that dimensions of recognition and relatedness can be used to boost motivation and increase the effect size of the impact of the HRPs, managements can learn to invest more on these boosting practices.

2). Change implies increase or decrease, or review altogether of an action. Things that look small might have huge impact on perception formation. The impact of 'interstimulations' on perception formation has been emphasized in this thesis. Certain forms of RB – 'the extras'- e.g. bonus, enable extra-role effort. When perceived, 'the extras' can potentially change employee behaviour. Short delays in responding with incremental investment can result in losing the starting investment made in training one's employees.

3). Given the finding that multiple stakeholders are contributory to the emergence of OFP, organisations should endeavour to adopt HRPs that stimulate high and positive perceptions and positive emotions or motivation for both managers and employees. Employee's behaviour and attitude could be changed with management recognition and effective RB practices leading to improved discretionary effort and then to OFP. Perceived management recognition and perceived employee loyalty could generate positive HR outcomes and impact OFP eventually. Management perception of employee's discretionary effort and loyalty, for example, could motivate management to show commitment to TD+RB budget or even increase investment.

4). The suggestion by respondents that there is high employee sensitivity to RB than TD subject though to EVS could be useful insight for managers' planning and implementing different HRP packages. The conditioning practice of matching

Training with commensurate RB, can be an effective HR management practice, otherwise the organisation trains for her competitors. If RB has a stronger influence on perception as suggested, not matching them to Training when employees expect such, could attract negative HR outcomes. There is the usual temptation on management to break the bank to satisfy the needs of employees. Continuously investing heavily in practices which provide extrinsic motivation for employees does not necessarily result in reduced turnover, employee commitment and loyalty. Without the HR function studying over a period the effective ratio of RB to TD investment that results in maximum effect size, managements risk over-investing or subjecting the organisation to being over-exploited in trying to, for instance, match RB to TD.

5). Most organisations' management teams negotiate workers RB package with the Union annually. From my experience in industry, most times such negotiations take longer than expected and in some cases end with the Union dragging out workers for a strike sometimes costing the organisation a lot in lost time and revenue. Strangely, managements have not discontinued such negotiated-agreed practices may be for institutional-isomorphic reasons (to gain social approval or to imitate others). Organisations should consider adopting discretionary HRP as more effective and efficient than continuing to use costly Negotiated-Agreed packages in contracting. Having discussed the implications of the findings to managerial practice, I now suggest some areas or aspects for further research.

### **7.5 Future research directions**

I suggest six areas for further research.

*'Epistemic integration of the knowledges of the different mechanisms' identified*

Since the HRM-P phenomenon is complex and has an open systemic context, I have argued that it has characteristics of 'multi-mechanismicity' and emergence. I highlighted that there exist emergent levels and emergent outcomes due to the interpenetration and combining of the different distinct/key HRM mechanisms identified. There is the need to understand more about these distinct mechanisms and their combination and interactions so we can not only understand the HRM-P phenomenon more, but also define the HRM-P field. Further research is needed along what Bhaskar (2010: p5) referred to as 'synthetic interdisciplinary work involving the epistemic integration of knowledges of the different mechanisms' identified in this thesis.

*The ratio of TD to RB*

In chapter 2, I promised to consider whether TD and RB are internally consistent and externally aligned with strategy when constituted as an organisation's SHRP and to conceptualise the internal synergistic relationship among the two practices and to try to understand how they as a bundle or a system may impact OFP. My notion of a 'matched TD+RB' connoting what other researchers and practitioners call 'effective RB system' is viewed as a SHRP. TD is effective and highly valued by employees when the organization adequately compensates them commensurate with the level of training they have undergone, and the RB is effective when matched to a worker's productivity which is related to the training-related competences acquired. This matching is complementary and 'synergistic relationship'. Research needs to investigate further the nature of RB and TD in order to find out the ratio of RB

package needed to match a specific competence level and put the right dosage of perception on the employee and the employer. Knowing TD: RB ratio is necessary because it could help organisations avoid managers investing more than they should at each point in time on HR, i.e., knowing the ratio could prevent employer overinvesting.

### *Data collection techniques*

Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b) had argued that the limited CR-based empirical research was due to the 'lack of a more explicit methodology for data analysis' which could help researchers identify mechanisms for causal explanation. Criticising positivist empirical techniques, Hesketh and Fleetwood (2006) suggested that 'a more discursively reflexive approach to data collection' is what is required to access structures, mechanisms, powers and tendencies - meta-theoretical concepts they argue could lead to causal connection and explanation (p679). How can ontological depth be achieved when data collection techniques are based on prediction-focused, instead of causal explanation-focused techniques? I argue that in addition, explicit methods for Critical Realist interviewing for data collection could be used to alleviate a few of the weaknesses of the research design used for solving the research problem in particular and for problems benefiting from a CR approach. For example, the tediousness attributed to the GT-CR framework can be eased using a novel method for interviewing. A helpful task will be to do a CR question design as I suggested in section 3.5.1. In retrospect, I believe that including particular question types in a survey instrument could provide concise but informative (as against superfluous and so tedious) data useful for CR data analysis.

*Use the theoretical framework to guide data collection and test the theories*

I have asked myself the question: What could I have done differently for this research? This might be a reflection as well as an area for further research.

I set out exploring for the missing theory underpinning empirical research of the HRM-P link. Upon developing an integrated theoretical framework, I restated the research questions, guided by the theoretical framework, but I elected to be open-minded during data collection rather than allow the theoretical framework to guide data collection. What is the reason? The main goal of the research is not to test theory (even though I incorporated that in the discussion chapter) but to explore causation. If I were to re-do the empirical research part of this thesis, I would collect data by asking questions like below.

1. How do you as an employee perceive the HRPS – TD and RB – your company uses?

For example do you perceive HRPs as support or something else? What?

2. What beliefs do you hold about the HRPs your company uses, e.g. do you believe it shows they care about your needs or that they recognize your contributions?

3. How do your perceptions and beliefs make you feel?

4. What do these HRPs - TD and RB – make you do, i.e. how do your perceptions and beliefs make you behave or change behaviour towards the company or towards your roles?

5. How do you think your experiencing the HRPs – TD and RB – have turned you into, e.g. competent, independent actor, etc.?

6. How do you feel as a result of your experiences, e.g. feel fulfilled or what?

7. What do your experiences make you do (behaviour)?

8. How do you see it as your responsibility to give work efforts in exchange for your company's HRP's? What level of efforts?
9. How would you feel about your role fulfillment were your company to fall short in your perception?
10. How would you then react, e.g. stop work, reduce work output, etc.?
11. Can you describe how HRP's influence (put pressure on) your behaviour as an employee? Use TD and RB as examples.
12. Do you consider the HRP's as influencing your organisation's culture and as having power over your behaviour?

Take notice that questions 1-4 are derived from the OST, questions 5-7 from the SDT, questions 8-10 from the TCE, and questions 11-12 from the Institutional theory. Future empirical research may want to attempt this to compare the new findings with the findings herein.

#### *Fine-tune the process of data analysis*

It is still tedious to identify mechanisms using the extended framework and it is still 'difficult to explain the processes in how qualitative analysis is *actually* conducted' (Meyer and Lunnay 2013). I had to do a couple cycles of data analysis (data-analytic triangulation) to be satisfied that my data analysis could be replicated and that there is transparency (less ambiguity) in the identification of the mechanisms. Reviewing the extended framework and the data-analytic triangulation devised here while pursuing replication and the much needed process validation would remove repetitions thereby reducing tediousness and possibly achieving a 'heuristic device' as advocated by Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b). Another problem is that not all

researchers may be lucky to have the objects identified in the CR data analysis in congruence with the categories emerging from the GT data analysis. This is possible if the events selected from the hundreds of events in the data and from researcher's mental model and observations are a good sample of the data and related to the research questions. Future research can be directed at suggesting ways to differentiate events and what kind of events to focus on (Easton 2010: p128 called these 'discernible events') . Also, further studies can be directed at making the selection of concrete events clearer.

#### *Further work on the theoretical framework*

There indeed is required further work on the theoretical framework to not only explain how the interaction of structure and agency lead to behaviour change, but to provide a better explanation as to how that interaction could influence increased OFP. This may also require further research into the analysis of agency as not much was done in that aspect in this thesis where structural analysis was done.

## **7.6 Limitations of the research findings**

I discuss below the limitations that could have influenced the results and findings.

#### *Time constraints and generalisability*

Due to time-constraints, I have mostly used cross-sectional data. The use of longitudinal or even quasi-longitudinal survey has not been possible given that the research is time delimited. It has been observed by review researchers that organisational performances observed today may be caused by HRPs implemented a

few months or years ago (Boselie *et al.* 2005; Huselid and Becker 1996; Kato and Morishima 2002). Time is needed to fully observe the effect of a HRP. While the use of cross-sectional data does not invalidate the findings, users of the findings here should approach causal inferences with caution. Also, data has been collected from the petroleum industry in Nigeria. As a result of these constraints, the findings cannot therefore be generalized across industries, organisations, and countries.

#### *Depth and breadth of data*

To avoid the so-called inconsistencies in SHRM empirical research (Radcliffe 2005), a set of common HRPs (TD and RB) has been used as components in the SHRP-OFP model conceived. I have also used multi-actors (that is respondents from different sub-population per unit of analysis e.g. manager, and employees (Boselie *et al.* 2005) to ensure reliability and remove 'noise bias' usually arising from single-source respondents (Ibid.; cf. Gerhart *et al.* 2000; Purcell 1999; Ichniowski *et al.* 1996). Data was collected across the organisation, ranging from junior employees to the managing director of the main company surveyed.

Notwithstanding all these precautions and measures, there is no guarantee that the data collected has enough depth and breadth (see Radcliffe 2005) to describe the complex HRM-P phenomenon. I contend that a few of the respondents are not 'discursively reflexive' and so are unable to draw deep from their experiences and internal conversations while answering the interview questions. Therefore, the findings of this thesis, while reliable, are fallible and should be further researched.

*Difficulty in explaining effect size*

While reporting the results of this thesis, it has been difficult to explain the effect sizes. This is because qualitative techniques were used primarily. Even though I started the survey with questionnaires by which I tried to collect quantitative data, the nature of the objects studied and hence the research questions, and the complexity of the phenomenon studied required that I stick to qualitative techniques with interviews as the primary method. While there have been gains for this decision, effect size explanation may have been lost. For example, my data analysis seems to suggest that RB has greater effect size on desired outcomes like turnover (TO) when compared to TD. While not stating effect sizes does not diminish the impact of the findings, where a researcher gives weight to effect size considerations, the future research design might consider employing mixed-method longitudinal studies provided the researcher recognizes when to switch between quantitative and qualitative techniques.

*Complexity and identifying mechanisms*

Researchers seeking to identify mechanisms (especially with a qualitative method of analysis) have always been concerned about the difficulty in striking a balance between 'too generic' and 'too contingent' mechanisms in order to ensure that the identified key mechanism has strong explanatory power (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b: p13). They suggest a) that the 'experience and domain knowledge of the researcher' guides him or her in striking this balance; b) that postulating and assessing mechanisms will require that the researcher should have better insight into the structures conceptualised beyond the knowledge of his

respondents/interviewees (ibid.). It is difficult to set the boundaries of a complex HRM system (Easton 2010: p123) making the identification of key mechanisms difficult but not insurmountable. Whether the mechanisms identified in this thesis are too generic and whether they have strong explanatory power are open to debate. The fact that no study has yet espoused a HRM-P mechanism to HRM literature makes it all the more difficult to assess (Dirpal G. 2015 has used CR meta-theory to validate mechanisms he thinks exist in an organization's processes but not for identifying mechanisms and making causal claims). But there should be a starting point and the mechanisms identified here could serve as just that. It can be argued that from the above, presumably a CR approach could only develop a context-dependent account of the HRM-P relationship.

#### *Uncertainty of reaching GT closure*

After categorisation, possible properties of categories and their connectedness were outlined. According to GT, coding should continue which entails more data trips, till theoretical saturation of the properties, a requirement which is difficult to fulfil. It has been suggested that reaching closure after repeated data collection and analysis is largely dependent on the 'theoretical insights and domain knowledge of the researcher' (Bygstad & Munkvold 2011b; cf. Langley 1999). Though return trips were made a couple of times during data analysis and even during write-up, I still cannot guarantee that closure has been reached and the categories fully saturated. The impact usually of this limitation is that categories are suspected not to be theoretically dense (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The impact of this on the results of this thesis could be: i) some persons may argue that the mechanism identified

does not have very strong explanatory power as a result, and ii) emerging theories may be viewed by some as trivial.

Instead of striving to reach GT-type closure, I suggest that the researcher makes effort to check if the objects identified from the concrete events are congruent with the categories emerging from the GT data analysis. Because this condition when achieved is likely to make for easy validation of the research and the identification of mechanisms transparent, there is higher probability of identifying mechanisms with strong explanatory power. It seems plausible to add that the data-analytic triangulation used in the extended framework may reduce the impact of not reaching GT-type closure. In future, this impact can further be reduced by adopting longitudinal studies.

Because of the research limitations, the findings of this thesis, though reliable and valid, should be adopted with caution. This brings me to reflecting upon the thesis.

## **7.7 Reflections and Concluding statements**

### **7.7.1 Reflections**

One part of the research process easily ignored is the recursive or hermeneutic aspect of research (even in CR). This aspect requires that the researcher goes back to change his/her focus or theoretical framework or concepts after and/or during the analyses. Some researcher may regard this as 'retrofitting' but it is a valid and justifiable part of the interpretative process. Accordingly, I have noted in section 7.5 what I could have done differently in this thesis as being to allow the theoretical framework guide the data collection and so ask some theory-guided-questions and

so test the theories as part of the empirical research. I refer the reader to section 7.5 under the sub-heading '*Use the theoretical framework to guide data collection and test the theories*' to spare the reader any repetition here. Also, my contention in chapter 4 that my research questions are best addressed from a CR perspective and that phenomenology (heuristic inquiry) would be unsuitable for addressing my research questions does not stop me from reflecting, pondering and considering a change in focus.

Heuristic inquiry involves a deep exploration (by the researcher) of one's own experiences with the researched phenomenon (Caton and Santos 2007). To employ heuristic methodology or Inquiry, the researcher must have deep feelings about and connection with the phenomenon. Firstly, while I have and can bring my 'personal experiences, reflections, and insights' about HRPs in the petroleum industry to the fore of the thesis, in order to help us understand how petroleum workers experience various HRPs and how they make sense of them, I have no special 'lived experiences' that can be focused on to help understand the relationship between HRPs and performance (or an organisation's HR investments) which is at the core of this research - the essence of the HRM-P phenomenon. I do not think that the essence of this thesis is, like Sela-Smith would say, to inquire 'the interiority of our experience' (Sela-Smith 2002) as it is to explore relationships of objects. Djuraskovic and Arthur (2010) admonish that, 'one must have a direct experience of the phenomenon in question to be able to identify with experiences of others'. The aim of this thesis is not to 'explore my own personal experience on a deeper level' in order to understand others' experiences (Ibid.) of HRPs. I cannot claim that I have *particular experiences* about HRPs that I needed to understand that could transform my life.

Next, if a heuristic inquiry were to inform the research design, I doubt that the research questions which explore causality would be adequately answered. The utility of heuristic inquiry is to 'understand the essence of people's experiences' (Caton and Santos 2007) of a phenomenon, which is not exactly tracking my research problem and research questions. The reader may be asking, does this justify employing GT-CR as opposed to Phenomenology's heuristic inquiry?

By way of reflection, heuristic inquiry could be another way of researching the HRM-P phenomenon. Instead of investigating causality or the debate about the existence of the alleged link between HRPs and OFP, one could be investigating, trying to understand how and if OFP (an event) is experienced by organisations investing in HRPs. Co-researchers or participants in such research would be organisations represented by their senior managers and a deeply-felt researcher *who has an experience he wants to understand*. Another way to employ heuristic inquiry could be to research the deep-felt experiences of employees impacted by HRPs (e.g. experiences of financial wellbeing; inspiration; motivation; disengagement; attachment; loyalty; etc.) and how and if their responses could (or did) in turn engender financial wellbeing of their organisations. Co-researchers or participants in this case would be a researcher with a particular deep experience of HRP and other employees who experience HRP in a similar context, e.g. petroleum industry context. A typical research question could be: 'Who linked HRP to OFP and why?' Do we take as given the conception that HRM is linked to OFP? There is no reason why we should see this link as 'inevitable'. If we were to think counterfactually, and assume that HRM is not related or 'linked' to organisational

performance (i.e. negate the existence or beingness of a link), what difference will that make in the scheme of things? By linking the understood experiences of these employees with changes in the organisation, another interesting question would be: 'Through what means or pathway does HRP influence OFP?' This resembles the 'HRM-P Blackbox question' given in this thesis. It would be interesting to compare findings from such heuristic inquiry with the GT-CR approach used in this thesis.

### **7.7.2 Concluding statements**

I reviewed the HRM-P literature in the context of the research problem of inconclusive evidence in the claims that HRPs influence OFP and how they may be causally linked. I argued that based on mainstream approaches for researching HRM-P, there is no convincing proof yet of a causal link or even an association between HRPs and OFP. This position formed the basis for my research problem and questions. While extant literature focuses on the contributory problem factors of i) research design problem, and ii) methodological limitations which characterise existing research designs used so far in the HRM-P debate, I argued that the problem is rooted in a) a lack of adequate theory for empirical research in HRM-P link) and b) inappropriate meta-theory which informs the methodology used and hence the empirical research. I further argued for a CR meta-theory as useful in deriving a better alternative methodology for informing empirical research and for answering the research questions. The meta-theory and its derived methodology focus on explanation and understanding, not on prediction. Reviewing five organisational theories, I constructed an integrated theoretical framework whose frames guided the research process. The research design adopted was based on a Critical Realist

descriptive-Interpretive cross-sectional qualitative case study research with retroduction. I devised what I termed an 'extended framework for CR data analysis' by integrating explicit steps of existing CR frameworks for data analysis and the core elements of classical GT data analysis techniques. The extended framework focuses on the identification of mechanisms which connect cause to the phenomenon under investigation. The framework was operationalized using data collected from three service-focused companies in the petroleum industry in Nigeria. I demonstrated the flexibility of the CR approach employing what I termed 'data-analytical triangulation'. Following the steps of the GT-CR data analytic (extended) framework, first, I used GT analysis to derive codes, concepts, and categories from data. These gave insight to the objects in interplay in the system. Next, using the same data, via CR causal analysis, I identified explanatory mechanisms based on the retroduction step by Bygstad & Munkvold (2011b). Finally, I validated the results by framing the data analysis using the integrated theoretical framework earlier constructed in chapter two. With a data-analytical triangulation, the researcher might have insight as to the suitability or not of the collected evidence (data) and the replicability of his/her findings.

Aside from other findings, I found that a SHRP tends to cause OFP. Mediating the SHRP-OFP relationship are at least, eight distinct but combining-interpenetrating mechanisms (PSS, Affect, Co-determined, Exchange Transaction, Governance structure, Isomorphic, EVS, and MBS) and several HR and organisational outcomes like PR, TO, and Loyalty. Of the twelve distinct mechanisms indicated by the five component theories of the integrated framework, there was explicit evidence from

data to support eight of them while the remaining four (profit-maximization, VRIN-ranked value creating strategy, institutional, and corporate strategy mechanisms) have implicit evidences from data with the observation that the micro-mechanisms constituting some of the distinct mechanisms hold their effects or are their types.

I discussed the limitations of the findings, the contributions to literature and management practice, and proposed a modification of the organisational support theory and suggested directions for further studies.

Finally, while a CR approach cannot provide all the right answers (Easton 2010: p128), I contend that prediction-based empiricist quantitative research would have been unable to explore the kind of depth CR permits or to throw light on the complex processes in the HRM-P blackbox. While contemporary research has studied HRM-P from the positivist-quantitative perspectives focused on skills-motivation-performance framework, this research has studied it from a perception-experience-emotion perspective or framework. The limitations of this research notwithstanding, this thesis' findings hopefully have shown that a CR approach can potentially provide the HRM-P debate with a more robust research design, and consequently more reliable evidence for explaining the existence of a HRM-P link or relationship and the nature of such a relationship.

## **Appendix A**

### **PILOT STUDY OR SURVEY**

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- Pilot study took place from September to October 2013.

A pilot survey was initiated in order to test the questionnaires, the interview instrument, the research design, and to select appropriate sample size before embarking on the main study. The reader is advised to read the literature review and the methodology chapters in order to appreciate this document.

Questionnaires were designed to collect information about HRPs (causal mechanisms), human agents and their agency, and their analyses and interpretation aimed at providing information to support 'rich explanation', viz.

- Enabling and constraining information from the structures and mechanisms etc.
- Reproducing and transforming information from agency
- Hermeneutic information from agents
- Opinions of respondents which are indicative of their attitudes in the workplace

## **Method**

### **Sample**

I planned to carry out the pilot study in three service companies in the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. I represent the two companies as Wells, B, and S. The Companies were written and provided with abstracts, ethics information and contact addresses. A Case-control study was envisaged based on the research design.

Company S was used as case-control study, to test questions or ideas used in the questionnaires sent to respondents in Wells and B. This author carried out a participant observation (cohort or action research) study in Company S.

I promised to provide the companies some excerpts of the results from the research for their use, including executive brief which will include results from the control survey. I also promised them to work with their HR departments to design (or re-design) some HRP/policies for management to consider implementing. I fulfilled the first promise in Wells.

I succeeded in sending out the self-administered questionnaires to respondents in Companies B and S. I planned a minimum 30% response rate from the questionnaires. I used two different questionnaires, one for non-managers and managers; the other for senior managers and Managing Directors/Consultants for the reason that certain information can only be provided by certain category of staff. To obtain the kind of 'rich explanation' I sought, and have the respondents interpret the events in the workplace (policy or ordinary events), I had to direct some questions to some calibre of respondents.

I planned to interview the Managing Partner of Company B and the Managing Director, General Manager, HR Manager, and a few other staff (non-managers) in Wells, all these as long as their managements give approval. All the interviews were to be recorded on tape. No interviews were held in Wells and Company B during the pilot study though interviews were held in Company S. This was due to scheduling issues.

## Measures

I focused on two HRPs as below.

- a. TD
- b. RB

The questionnaire was designed to capture certain information such that I have the groups of questions as follows:

- Questions that reflect the enabling and constraining powers of structures and mechanisms etc. and their tendencies
- Questions dealing with agents and agency (prior and active) which interact with the structures and mechanisms etc. My aim was to investigate their transforming and reproducing powers and tendencies
- Questions that tap Hermeneutic information and aid robust explanation

Twenty five questionnaires (a 85% response rate) and ten questionnaires (a 100% response rate) were received from Companies B and S respectively.

## Findings

Below are summaries (outline) of the findings.

Company 'Wells':

- The pilot study did not take place in Wells.

Company B:

Company is a small local petroleum service company with staff strength of 35. A total of 20 questionnaires were sent out with 17 received back giving a response rate of 85%. The interview with the Managing Consultant (the only one approved by management to be interviewed) did not hold due to scheduling constraint.

**Initial findings from the respondents, analysis and conclusion:**

- Company B spends heavily annually on TD and 50% of its annual turnover is on RB.
- The individual effect of TD was reported as enhancing generally a strong positive effect on staff competences, motivation, confidence, personal satisfaction and productivity. It is reported that it has a weak positive effect on company financial performance and no effect on reducing turnover (loyalty to remain with the company). Options range from strong positive to strong negative in five divisions.
- The individual effect of RB was reported to be weak positive effect on motivation and strong positive effect on financial performance. Generally, most staff believe that neither TD nor RB has influence on whether they leave or stay (employee turnover).
- The collective effect of TD and RB ranges from marginal or good on productivity, motivation, and financial performance and poor to marginal on employee turnover (staying or leaving the company) where 1=poor, 2=insignificant, 3= marginal, 4 =good; 5=excellent.

- The Company finds it hard to measure motivation and other constructs which was expected and uses profit or annual turnover to measure financial performance.
- There is a positive relationship reported between TD and RB individually or collectively (as a SHRP) on motivation, productivity and OFP but marginal or no effect on turnover (loyalty to stay with company).
- **The tentative explanation** is that TD and RB elicit certain perceptions and feelings in employees. They thus respond to this perception of being valued, of having a future with the company by working harder and showing loyalty and cooperation. Clearly TD and RB are linked to motivation of employees but whether they are linked to or associated to OFP is at this stage unclear. The explanation for the turnover case is that employees will normally leave small companies for big petroleum companies no matter what TD or RB was packaged for them. The socio-cultural perception of company size effect in choice of where to work long-time is influential. Company size therefore biases noticing the effect of TD and RB on turnover.
- Responses from the questionnaires were not deep enough to give the kind of insight required by the research questions. Interviews were expected to better illuminate grey areas. Also, some of the questions were not clear and needed re-phrasing. Some questionnaires needed a re-structuring to help tease out the real opinions, meanings and interpretations of the respondents. These were corrected in the main case questionnaires.

### Control survey in Company S

In order to achieve a pure transformation in a workplace (Transformational nature of social activity), and in view of the fact that agents draw upon “pre-existing structures and mechanisms in order to initiate action”, the ‘pre-existing stock’ of reality which the workers in a workplace draw upon need to be “pure”. For this reason, I determined that the control survey should be carried out in a start-up company where the “pre-existing stock of conceptual reality” in the main is pure as much as can be achieved or its “impurity” reduced. This provides grounds to test out innovative ideas, ground-breaking concepts, and adjusting known HRPs and concepts provided by research and practitioners. My thinking was and still is that the agents who draw upon the HRPs initiate unfettered action which I as participant observer can study to “understand” and “assess the efficacies of tendencies and counter-tendencies” of the HRPs [structure and mechanism combined].

During my short stay at Company S (2012 to 2014), I tried to test the ideas (hypotheses or conjectures) which had been proposed by researchers (including myself) as having potential for “best” HRPs in petroleum or other organisations. Employees in Company S were used as test (control) group. They were monitored from interview stage to induction with a questionnaire and interview (for example, in this control case the researcher asked a small group of new hires to write a 1000 word essay right after their 2-day induction, which essay was started from the day they received their job offers (by email), from where I captured their impressions of the interview, investigated qualitatively their excitement or otherwise prior to being offered the job and the excitement/impressions from the induction phase. The workers started out with a relatively low salary since S is a start-up company). The

job role was made special by giving them freedom to take up assignments their skills and attributes permitted. This was aimed at motivating the new employees who were either young graduates who had recently completed their masters degrees or were young professionals with at least 5 years' experience but de-motivated in their previous job. During the induction, the new hires were made to see themselves as having a say in their career and how their jobs were done through using a special internal workflow which they were also expected to help develop further. The new inexperienced hires had a job design which required them to learn and be proficient in running most of the services the company offered clients with a promise to attain managerial positions in short time. Their job design was made flexible and they were made aware that they were to help in crafting the job description. Flexible work times were proposed, novelties that surprised them. The new hires were given top-level assignments that drew from their existing talents and competencies as identified by the author during the interview and the essay debrief. They were placed in project groups right away where they could be coordinators or assistant coordinators. They were made to feel useful to the company from outset and told that they were the centre of a high performance work system the company had designed. New hires were told right away their training programs interspersed with examinations or tests after each training modules requiring a pass mark of 70% and hazard of being released after two failures to score up to 70%. Options to receive company shares were presented as benefits.

I tried to investigate if a 'particular causal mechanism' e.g. induction, training, job design, etc. has "tendency" to motivate the new hires and to impact their

behaviour positively creating high productivity and low turnover and eventually affecting the company's financial performance; testing out the "thick explanation" idea of Fleetwood (2013) attempting to capture "hermeneutic information" thus exploring the "intentions" of the workers, understand the tendencies possessed by the workers.

### **Initial findings from the respondents, analysis and conclusion:**

Initial information gathered is that the experienced new hires saw their job role design and expected TD scheme as exciting and career-path changing and strong enough to cause a reduced turnover in favour of S but disfavour of their former companies. The new hires believed that their RB package are low but observed that they would rather commit to the company 'S' in expectation that the gains from TD will rub off handsomely as they hoped to attract better pay from company S in a not too distant future.

Going by the questionnaires, respondents in Company 'S' feel that there is a positive relationship (stronger than respondents in company B had it) between TD and RB individually or collectively (as a SHRP) on motivation, productivity and OFP but good positive effect on reduced employee turnover (loyalty to stay with company).

### **Concluding generally from the pilot study**

There seems to be a strong to weak positive link between two HRPs and OFP through their effects on intermediate HRM outcomes like motivation and productivity but no effect or weak positive effect at best with reduced turnover (i.e.

employees remaining with the company) and these relationships, it appears, are mediated by contextual variables in each company such as company size, age, their service offerings, maturity or experience level of employees, etc. Going by evidences in empirical research in the discipline, this initial finding leans towards Wall and Wood (2005) and Boselie *et al.* (2005) than towards Huselid (1995) and Katou (2010) implying I need to apply caution in speaking about a causal link and need better evidence.

The mechanism through which this comes about is yet to be fully explained from the questionnaires' data requiring questionnaire review and non-structured interviews and a detailed Critical Realist-informed qualitative analysis.

Further limitation could be that the survey sample sizes are small (but this is expected for the type and size of companies I set out to use for the survey in what is a case study, albeit cross-sectional study at this stage). Typical sample sizes in empirical research in the discipline used samples varying from less than 100 to less than 300 with response rates between 4% and 84% (Wall and Wood 2005). That my samples were between 10 and 25 (with 100 and 85% response rates respectively) for the two companies I eventually pilot-surveyed leaves a size effect which is not 'a secure foundation from which to generalize' (Ibid.). The sample size effect and rater biases leading to measurement errors and reliability-validity issues could be part-causes of 'inconclusivity of evidence' for the alleged link between HRPs and OFP with the pilot survey. Aside from planning some sort of quasi-longitudinal survey, I modified the questionnaire such that the measures or ratings of HRPs and the

measures of performance do not come from the same respondents/source especially with the senior management questionnaires.

#### Plan post-pilot study

After the pilot study, the main case survey was embarked upon in the year 2014 after reviewing the questionnaires and interview questions.

**Appendix B****INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (EXCERPTS)****Interview questions for employees**

1. Please describe your career history and current role.
2. Has HR played any role in your career-positive or negative?
3. What importance do you think your role plays in achieving your Company's intermediate and ultimate goals?
4. Does the training and development practice in your company affect your individual productivity? Motivation? Loyalty to remain with the company for the next couple of years? Please explain how these come about.
5. Does the rewards and benefits package have similar impacts on you or not? Please explain how these come about.
6. Do you think training and development practices influence the financial success of your company?

**Interview questions for Management**

Do you agree that aligning your human resource practices with your competitive business strategy creates a source of competitive advantage for your company?

- Please explain your last answer

Do you agree with the view that your workforce and your Human resource practices provide a significant contribution to your company's financial performance?

- Please explain your last answer

Do you agree that Training and development improves the competences of your staff and ultimately leads to improved productivity?

Why does management really do Training and Development practices?

- Can she afford not to do it?

Why does management really do Rewards and Benefits practices?

- Can she afford not to do it?

How can management affect or change the perceptions of workers so they respond well to Training and development and Rewards and Benefits practices?

What is it about the nature of Training and Development practice that makes it influence employee motivation and productivity?

What is it about the nature of Rewards and Benefits practice that makes it influence employee motivation and productivity?

What is different about the nature of petroleum workers compared to other workers with respect to Training and development and Rewards and benefits practices?

## **Appendix C**

### **EXCERPTS FROM THE DATA ANALYSIS BASED ON GT CODING (WITH MEMOING)**

2) Data showing that 'TD creates 'skills and knowledge' which are part of the 'competences' that can be further 'developed' leading to 'zero lost time incidence (LTI)' then to 'reduction of costs' and then to improved company finances or 'OFP'.

Question: Does TD affect you as a worker? If yes how does it really affect you as a worker, if no, why not?

Panel respondent 1: TD affects not only the skill set and competency of the worker but affects the development of the worker and thereby the financial base of the company. using HSE as an example, not just increasing financial base but training reduces additional cost that may have incurred due to unsafe act due to lack of competence.

Panel respondent 2: From the angle of building competence in personnel, if no competence as a field engineer you may not complete task on time to save cost or you may make mistakes that would increase cost-so training the employee helps develop employee. Relevant training helps develop the employee and hence the organisation.

4) Data showing the place of 'relationships' or 'relatedness' depicted by 'recognition' (social recognition), 'equal opportunity' (equity or social justice) and being treated well depicted by 'get his money when he should' (fidelity) and 'conducive working environment'(climate/ambience). All these tied to 'morale boosting'.

Question: Assuming the training is well packaged, what do we need in the environment for the training to work out well?

Panel Respondent 1: Recognition is important. You can call the trainee after their training and recognize them. Even the guy that didn't do well will be encouraged to work harder.

Panel respondent 2: conducive working environment.

Panel respondent 2: If your staff doesn't get his money when he should he can be demoralised.

Panel respondent 1: Equal opportunity is key.

15) Data shows organization needs to recognize what it Values. 5-step-'recognition' that boosts morale: Recognise the trainee is no more a trainee (greenhorn or child); recognize him/her and treat as an asset to the company; recognise him/her by promoting him/her and reviewing his/her compensation to match the new status; recognize him/her with letter of appreciation for jobs well done; recognize outstanding employees with performance merit allowance.

HR respondent: Once we have trained an employee, we do evaluations annual or quarterly- it is like moving him from a child to an adult and we can see his potentials that the employee can competently handle some tasks..One, you have to recognise the employee Obi is no more a child, you have to treat Obi as a man...you have to promote that person Obi, recognise the person that he is an asset. Such recognition goes a long way, everything is not about money..promotion goes with money when we review the compensation; Two, show appreciation; letters of appreciation for job

well done, it boosts morale... We have what we call performance merit allowance for outstanding employees, they are the ones that make things happen. We recognise them. These are the morale boosters.

16) Data shows the institutional pressure from Unions – ‘union pressure as internal context’; ‘conflict inducing on HR management or HR function’. ‘Union activities’ viewed as hardly resulting in business efficiency as it ‘increases transaction costs’ in **the contract between employee and employer**. The fact that the agreement is ‘binding’ seems to me that the employer is forced into committing, not acting discretionarily. That explains why from time to time, instead of being cost reducer, negotiated-Agreed contracts become transaction and operational costs centre and conflict-inducers. Negotiated-Agreed contracts are ‘a pay or lose and train or lose contracts’. Discretionary contracts may be better than either negotiated-agreed contracts which are union enforced and forced tenure commitment contracts (a ‘stay or lose contract’) which are management enforced. I suggest four contract types in HRM-P which are governance structures in HRM-P systems: negotiated agreed contract; forced tenure commitment contract between employee and employers with the middle ground as discretionary contracts (how do you design this contract and who supervises it?); and the fourth is Service contract between contractor organization and client organization. Can the discretionary contract be designed like or borrow elements from the service contract or from the non-unionised employees’ contracts?

By my experience, union activities in Nigeria almost always lead to conflict/showdown with management, relationship breakdown/failure. PENGASSAN

and Petroleum technologies association of Nigeria (representing local petroleum service companies) are in a deep showdown as of March 2018 with potential of thousands of petroleum workers losing their jobs due to disagreements between workers and owners about levels of remuneration and entitlements even now that the petroleum industry faces long unprecedented downturn since 2014.)

Question: How regularly do you do this (salary reviews)?

HR respondent: Not a regular thing. We have conditions of service which is reviewed every 3 years. Every 3 years there is negotiation between management and PENGASSAN (for senior staff) and management and NUPENG (for junior staff). Every aspect is reviewed. In as much as we work on these incentives, the conditions of service are reviewed every three years...an in-depth thing.

Question: So the union has input?

HR respondent: Yes.

Question: Rewards and benefits, is it not a draw down on company's finances?

Management respondent: No. It is agreed with the trade unions and is binding.

28) Data shows impact of 'socio-cultural factors'. Forms of relatedness: kinship/cultural affinity/bragging effect that could determine TO and determine the efficacy of implemented Training event: 'Style' is important. 'Ego could influence TO'. 'Feeling left behind could influence performance and TO'. Is this some form of Institutional isomorphism? No.?

Question: What would you really, em, I know that some time you said overseas training is needed here and you talked about closing the gap between the remunerations and benefits practiced here and that of your competitors aside the need for overseas training..what do you really think that if done by your management it will probably mean more of a praise-the praise effect on the staff and it will create kind of two times the situation you'd like to see..you are a cell leader already, you understand how these things affect those under you what would you advise your company and any company to do extra from where you people are now in order to create a more positive impact for training on one hand and a positive impact for RB on the other hand. I want your thoughts?

Respondent: yeah! Training like I said before is very important. A student under the mango tree studying mechanics/physics and another student in a hot classroom studying the same mechanics/physics and another student in an air-conditioned room studying the same physics will get the same message but I am very sure that the level of assimilation may differ due to environment..OK, I call it style. Anything you do that is not stylish..I tend to have a problem with it. I don't want to appear in any place and look like a poor relative..so in the oil industry most of us graduated from Nigerian Universities possibly passed through same classrooms...and we are like peers and friends and we meet out. Others will be talking about when they were in Houston, did you see that car in California. We are in a third world country all of us work in the oil industry same third world country Nigeria, but you find out that due to exposure or venue for training others sound as if they are kind of higher than you. Perhaps, on the job you get more results than them, you get more recognised in the

industry. But, outside the industry, you now tend to be trailing behind them, when they talk about new technologies, things that are in vogue, the in thing you are still dwelling in some ten years-back stuff, so I see it as something that if you really want to train, train in a good environment, give them that exposure, outside the classroom training where they have recess they should be able to see some different things, atmosphere, meet different people, see different way of doing things, mix up with different cultures. You cannot really start your life in Nigeria and end it in Nigeria. It doesn't really show your...to me that's my own understanding. So, that's why I hit hard on the overseas training...Teach me that algebra in Houston I will learn the algebra and learn one or two new things in Houston and know yeah I have been to Houston.

Question: But what if your company cannot afford it?

Respondent: That's what I am saying. That is where it affects motivation and benefits. If my company cannot afford it and if I don't have my personal goals and targets as a human being if I see a company that can afford it I could quickly cross over so I can get that experience. I may be a champion in my field in company A but I feel there are things lacking in me (We all have what we quest for. Ego thing yes), maybe I hang out with my friends, they keep talking about overseas trip and I keep telling them about Nigeria. One day I may feel slighted and the solution for that problem may be is to look for a company that could also expose me to such overseas trips.

## Appendix D

### LIST OF CODES

**(The codes are in parentheses (“”). Some codes have memos added to give properties and some clarity)**

1. TD generates ‘skills and knowledge’
2. TD generates ‘competences’
3. ‘Competences related to Cost reduction’
4. ‘Trained and developed employees configurable into a ‘competitive advantage’
5. ‘Competence, zero lost time and reduced costs mediate TD – OFP relationship’
6. TD+RB related to the ‘kind of employee in the system’
7. ‘Only employees with the right kind of *motivation*’ need be trained’  
‘Relatedness’ generated by:
8. ‘social recognition’[see 5-aspects of recognition below]
9. ‘equity’ or ‘equal opportunity’;
10. ‘fidelity’ depicted by ‘get his money when he should’;
11. ‘conducive working environment’ (climate or ambience).
12. Relatedness factors are ‘morale boosting’ agents
13. ‘RB as determinant of investments security’
14. ‘RB has a greater effect size on a desired outcome employee turnover (TO)’
15. ‘Not matching TD commensurately with RB leads to TO’
16. ‘TD impact on TO is contingent on employee value system (EVS)’  
[It seems that TD has lesser effect size on outcomes]
17. ‘TD is not a sole *source of motivation*’  
[It seems that TD has lesser effect size on desired outcomes]
18. Employee *motivated* by EVS’
19. ‘TD is linked to OFP mediated by competence’ ‘TD is a cost-reducing factor’.
20. ‘HRP determines the kind of employee in the system’ and ‘the quality of work in the system’
21. ‘HRP linked to motivation’ and ‘competitiveness’

22. 'Continuously *motivating* employees could result to increased organisational finances'

RB and Praise are linked to:

23. 1) '*motivation*' or 'RB and praise as emotion-conditioning-factors' [Maslow's motivation theory]

24. 2) 'going the extra mile' or 'enhanced productivity behaviour'

'TD leads to:

25. 1) 'kind of employee in the system' and

26. 2) 'quality of work in the system' and

27. 3) 'revenue' for organization and client; 'wage' for employee; [multistakeholder perspective]

28. 4) 'impact on client' or 'multistakeholder effect'. [multistakeholder perspective]

29. Training is linked to contract (a governing structure)

30. 'RB leads to OFP mediated by happiness and reduced operational error/NPT'. Here 'RB influences OFP by conditioning emotion leading to cost-reduction behaviours'.

31. 'Power of HR function' or 'resource dependence theory confirmed'

32. 'need to 'match TD and RB' (mimesis) and 'vertical and horizontal fit of TD and RB'

[It seems that matching them produces greater effect size on desired outcomes]

33. Matching RB with TD policy/practice imitated from other organisations (mimesis)

34. 'Match the trend or lose out' (imitate) [mimetic isomorphism: Institutional theory]

35. 'Matched TD and RB practice mitigates employee turnover (TO)'

36. 'HR as valuable competitive asset'

37. Recognition of valued employees

5-step-'recognition' that boosts morale or 5 components/dimensions of recognition that boosts morale:

38. Recognise that the trainee is no more a trainee (greenhorn) – 'recognize status change or change in competence' or 'recognize change in competence';

39. recognize him/her and treat as an asset to the company or 'recognize as valuable';

40. recognise him/her by promoting him/her to match the new status or 'recognize by compensating new status';
41. recognize him/her with letter of appreciation for jobs well done or 'recognize quality job done';
42. recognize outstanding employees with performance merit allowance or 'recognize consistent standout performers' or 'recognize consistency'
43. 'union pressure as internal context';
44. 'conflict-inducing on HR management or HR function'. Researchers may need to consider the HR function as an independent stakeholder in order to understand it. In that case, it is seen as wielding some powers, because it holds the resources the organization needs to survive. An example of 'Coercive isomorphism' in Institutional theory.
45. 'Union activities' hardly resulting in business efficiency (implicit) or 'union activities' negative correlation to business efficiency'
46. Union activities 'increases employee-employer contract transaction and operational costs' or Negotiated agreed contracts as conflict-inducing and cost centre (implicit)
47. 'HR function faces internal and external institutional pressures'. Researchers may need to consider the HR function as an independent stakeholder in order to understand it. In that case, it is seen as wielding some powers, because it holds the resources the organization needs to survive. This is like 'Coercive isomorphism' in Institutional theory.
48. 'power-conflict' between management commitment and HR function' or 'forced organisational commitment linked to negotiated agreed contracts'; or 'negotiated agreed contracts likely to lead to relationship failures'. Researchers may need to consider the HR function as an independent stakeholder in order to understand it. In that case, it is seen as wielding some powers, because it holds the resources the organization needs to survive. It is like 'Coercive isomorphism' in Institutional theory. Management – HR function relationship might be viewed as analogous to the Principal-Agent relationship and problem.
49. 'management beliefs can come into conflict with HR function'
50. 'poaching HR strategy' can conflict with the HR function.
51. 'forced tenure commitment contracts' aimed to mitigate employee turnover (TO)'- example of adaptation by 'feasible foresight' on the part of management
52. 'TD mediated by increased productivity (PR), leads simultaneously or concurrently to increase in RB and increase in OFP'; reverse causality
53. 'RB mediated by *motivation* (M) and increased productivity (PR) leads to increase in OFP and increased RB'. Reverse causality

54. 'TD mediated by safe quality cost effective service (SQCES) leads to OFF';
55. 'TD leads to employee improved performance and to reduced NPT' (NB: SQCES = reduced NPT);
56. 'TD makes client happy given SQCES'; [multistakeholder perspective. Client expresses emotion or client emotion regulated or conditioned by TD]
57. 'TD gives organization retained contract';
58. 'TD gives community and society clean environmental –no oil spill' [multistakeholder effect]
59. 'Organisations compare and benchmark salaries and benefits' – example of mimetic isomorphism
60. Organisations try to copy/imitate or resemble other organisations – example of mimetic isomorphism
61. 'Training is linked to employee happiness and job satisfaction'; 'Training as emotion regulator/conditioner'
62. 'training related to client happiness'; 'Training as emotion regulator/conditioner' of client [multistakeholder effect]
63. 'training related to organization/management happiness'; 'Training as emotion regulator/conditioner' of organization [multistakeholder effect]
64. 'training related to the happiness of all stakeholders' or 'Multistakeholder effect of Training as emotion conditioner or regulator'
65. 'Existence of contracts (agreements) between employer and employee'
66. 'union negotiated agreement as contract'
67. 'employees open themselves up for 'poaching' (example of 'outlier disturbances')
68. 'competitor companies poach well-trained employees of their competitor' – example of opportunism
- conflicting views of respondents.:** 'TD does not really impact motivation as it depends on one's value system (EVS)' versus 'TD impacts motivation'
69. 'RB has positive influence on organisational finances and growth'
70. RB + Bonus leads to pat on the back, smiles on faces, excitement and happiness, then going extra mile. 'RB as emotion-regulator/conditioner and productivity enhancer'.
71. 'Socio-cultural factors as forms of relatedness'
72. Kinship/cultural affinity/bragging effect as determinants of TO or 'Relatedness and Ego influence TO'

- 73. Kinship/cultural affinity/bragging effect as determinants of the efficacy of implemented Training event or 'Relatedness and Ego influence training efficacy'.
- 74. 'Style' as determinant of efficacy of training
- 75. 'Ego could influence TO'
- 76. 'Feeling left behind could influence performance and TO' or 'Relatedness impacts performance and TO'
- 77. 'RB affects happiness and job satisfaction' or 'RB as emotion conditioner'
- 78. Management bias or belief system responsible for TO and relationship failures [see note 26. Principal - Agent problem].
- 79. 'Exchange Ideology'
- 80. 'Generational and Age expectations'
- 81. 'New challenge'
- 82. 'negative profitability bias'
- 83. 'shelf life bias'
- 84. 'Staff retention biases'
- 85. 'Forced Loyalty'
- 86. 'Forced management Commitment view'
- 87. 'Management exchange ideology'

## Appendix E

### LIST OF CONCEPTS

No:	Concepts	Constituent Codes	Remarks including properties
1	HRP as source of competitive Advantage	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,17,21,26,32,36,37	Kind of employee in the system; quality of work in the system; competencies of workforce through their skills, knowledge and attitude
2	RB influences OFP	13,23,24,30,51,69,70,71	RB influences OFP <i>mediated by Affect, enhanced productive behaviour and cost-reducing behaviours</i>
3	TD influences OFP	5,6,7,55,61	TD influences OFP <i>mediated by Affect, and cost-reducing behaviours</i>
4	Multistakeholder effects of TD.	5,19,27,28,29,55,56,57,58,61,62,63,64	
5	A SHRP influences business efficiency (OFP)	52,53,54,57	A SHRP influences OFP <i>mediated by motivation, Productivity, and Safe quality cost effective service.</i>
6	Employee value system (EVS) as determinant of employee motivation	18	EVS can be viewed as employee ideology. EVS is a determinant of employee's motivation.
7	Continuous motivation influences OFP	22	From the data, motivating factors include recognition, relatedness, EVS, Praise, and Matched TD+RB
8	Relatedness as morale booster	8,9,10,11,12,71,72,73	Five components of relatedness are social recognition, equity, fidelity, socio-cultural factors, and climate. 'Fidelity' can be viewed as antonym to 'opportunism'. Managers' perception is linked to how they relate with employees.
9	Relatedness, style, and ego affect Training efficacy	73, 74	
10	Dimensions of Recognition	37,38,39,40,41,42	Five dimensions of recognition in the data include: 1) 'recognize status change, i.e. 'recognize change in competence'; 2) 'recognize employee as valuable'; 3) 'recognize by compensating new status'; 4) 'recognize quality job done'; 5) 'recognize consistent standout performers' i.e. 'recognize consistency'. Managers' perception is linked to the recognition

			of employees.
11	Determinants of employee Turnover	14,15,16,32,35,72,75,76,78	Ego, MBS, EVS, Matched TD+RB, relatedness
12	Matching TD+RB as mimesis	33,34,59,60	Imitation (compare and benchmark) as an example of mimetic isomorphism in Institutional theory. Matching produces greater effect size on desired outcomes. Constituting a system of HR practices, TD and RB matched can have good internal or horizontal fit when they complement each other or externally fit or vertically integrated when they are aligned with the organisation's strategy of, for example, safe quality cost effective service.
13	Powers of the HR function	31,47,48	Researchers may need to consider the HR function as an 'independent stakeholder' in order to understand it. In that case, it is seen as wielding some powers, because it holds the resources the organization needs to survive. It is like 'Coercive isomorphism' in Institutional theory. (see Jackson and Schuler 1995 cf. Meyer & Rowan 1977, Zucker 1977). The Management – HR function can be viewed as analogous to the Principal-Agent relationship and problem.
14	Institutional forces as determinant of HRPs	43,46,47	Same remarks as in #13 above.
15	Union activities influencing transactional costs	43,45,46	Pressure from Union activities as internal and external institutional forces
16	Conflict as feature of HRM	44,46,48,49,50	Union supervised contracts; management belief system; poaching as strategy can induce conflicts
17	Management Belief system (MBS) can conflict with HR function	49,78	MBS can be viewed as management's bias which sometimes conflicts with shareholders' (Principal's) positions and with HR function.
18	Contracts linked to HRP influence Behaviours	29,65,66	Negotiated-Agreed contracts; Service contracts; etc.
19	Contracts secure relationships and	46,65,66	Negotiated-Agreed contracts;

	relatedness		
20	Contracts or strategies indicating Opportunism	50,51,67,68	Outlier disturbances being managed. Poaching, forced tenure commitment contracts
21	Adaptation by Management	22,50,51,59, 60,68,	Forced tenure contract used to adapt to opportunism
22	Reverse Causality	52,53	
23	Training's powers/tendencies to generate feelings of competence	1,2,3,5, 19,20,25	

## Appendix F

### LIST OF CATEGORIES

No.	Categories	Constituent Concepts	Remarks including Properties
1	Powers/tendencies of a SHRP	1,2,3,5, 22	A SHRP constituted of TD and RB practices has powers/tendencies to influence OFP creating the SHRP - OFP link. SHRP can also be a source of competitive advantage and tends to exhibit reverse causality as characteristic effect in the HRM-P system.
2	Co-determination	6,7,8,9,10,23	Affect and co-determination influence employees' behaviours from the inside. They originate from HRP. Co-determinating factors (feeling competent, autonomous-heteronomous, and related) are suggested to tend to generate internal motivation that tends to generate optimal functioning of employees according to Self-determination theory.
3	Multi-stakeholder effects	4	This characterises effects in the HRM-P system. The multistakeholder perspective explores this tendency in HRM studies (see Way and Johnson 2005)
4	Affect	6,7,8	Perceptions of HRP by employees tend to create Affect and co-determination which influence employees from the inside.
5	Institutional and Political forces	12,14,15	Context/pressures on the organisation's decisions or behaviours. External not originating from HRP or from employee behaviour but from other stakeholders/environment.
6	Power and Conflict	13,16	Context/pressures on HRM function and in relationships wielded by actors; conflict between management and HR function sometimes leading to outsourcing the function.
7	Ideological and Belief systems	6,17	Internal moderators for management and employees; Management Belief System biases management against investing in HRP and for poaching. Employee Value System moderates employee behaviours as responses to HRP and organisational behaviours. Originate from natures of employee and managers (i.e. from who they are)
8	Stakeholders' Adaptation behaviours	11, 20, 21	If management adapts, how do employees and clients adapt to opportunistic behaviours) from management? Employees adapt by leaving (turnover) or resorting to Union (institutional forces) or government to pressure management to e.g. enforce agreed contracts. Clients adapt by severing contracts and by applying penalties in contracts.
9	Governance structures as mechanisms	8,18,19, 20, 21	Governance structure (e.g. employee contract) is seen as a tool or mechanism for transaction and adaptation. A contract for instance is characterised by incomplete information hence uncertainty unlike markets where there is complete information.
10	Isomorphic pressures as determinants of	12, 13, 14,	Imitating others (mimesis), coercion, and normative pressures are mechanisms that managements and employees are

	HRPs	15, 21	subjected to. For management, such pressures as imitating other organisations' adoption of HRPs, political and other institutional pressures determine the choice of HRPs. Employees are constrained to behave as the organisational culture/climate dictates, for example imitate other employees' way of doing tasks.
11	Managers' perception of employees' contributions	8, 10, 17, 22	MBS tend to influence managers' perception of the contributions of employees towards organisational goals. Such managers' perception can in turn motivate managers to invest more towards HRPs (a kind of reverse causality) and even motivate them (managers) to do their jobs better.

## **Appendix G**

### **RESEARCHER'S MENTAL MODEL USED AS DATA**

The below are information from the researcher's own experiences which have been included as data which sometimes could help to interrogate and/or interpret the respondent's opinions and views.

1. February to March 2014, a Field Engineer who has been seconded as Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Officer was sent to attend HSE training or courses by expert trainers on HSE matters during which he stayed two weeks at the trainers offices. Upon returning back to his desk after the two-week training, he looked elated and was telling his supervisors how transforming the courses were and showed motivation to contribute better to the HSE processes of the company. He averred that he was better equipped after the training to explain why what is done and volunteered to train others. This gives a clue to the likely effect of training to motivate a worker and influence her productivity. I reasoned that this employee who had just recently attended a company-sponsored training is a good candidate for interview when the time comes. I intend to ask questions like, 'what is your general impression about the HSE training in terms of its usefulness to your work as HSE officer and Field Engineer Trainee?'; 'Has your confidence level, motivation and productivity changed at all because of what you learned in that training?'

2. Experienced employees were used to mentor the trainees (a form of 'social exchange') during the period 2012 to 2014. Part of the mentoring involved 'setting up' - by way of socialization- known accepted or institutionalised oil industry structures (kind of 'antecedently existing structures') that the new hire/ trainees can

draw upon and socializing them to 'shared cultures' thereby constraining them to oil industry and service industry mind-set. For example, the industry structures socialize a trainee to 'tendential behaviours' that constrain and enable her to do a job hazard analysis before carrying out any task. The company had also to set up its own internal structures which every employee, experienced and trainee, had to draw upon. The aim was to set up institutions/routines expected to give the company competitive advantage upon workers internalizing some behaviours and adopting 'shared cultures'. Part of the structures was that every employee had to multi-task such that no employee expected to place himself or herself in just one role. This was seen by management to be useful if the start-up company were to survive and ties to her strategy to optimize human resource.

3. Cultural beliefs about the petroleum industry: Very high Expected Reward to Effort ratio compared to the Western world – Petroleum workers in Nigeria have a very high expectation about rewards level for an effort. The implication is that it takes a great deal for employee perception of support to be high in this jurisdiction, a factor that could moderate discretionary effort and productivity as a whole, if not turnover. Why this belief? Since the 1970s, Nigeria has had a mono-product economy which depends largely on crude oil for a large part of GDP (national revenue). Society has shown petroleum workers (even junior employees) as having above middle-class status in society implying that their earning power is above those of senior employees in other industrial sectors. The Expectancy theory argues that 'the strength of a tendency to act in a certain way depends on the strength of an expectation that the act will be followed by a given outcome and on the

attractiveness of the outcome to the individual'. Strength of a tendency to act in a certain way depends on the strength of the expectation that the action will result in a desired outcome and that the outcome is attractive to the individual. But since the expected reward to effort ratio is very high in the petroleum industry in Nigeria (that is, the strength of expectation is very high), does it imply that petroleum workers in Nigeria work hardest when compared with employees in other industrial sectors? There is no evidence to show what the answer is. But, one can argue that the petroleum workers in Nigeria may not be working as hard as they should given their expected (or actual) reward and benefit levels since as some SDT researchers have argued, extrinsic reward does not always result in optimal functioning or performance since it can impede intrinsic motivation if not minimised (McDaniel 2011).

4. Some dominance is needed in the petroleum industry. Like in military settings, the structure of the petroleum industry requires a kind of command-control structure to get tasks done. So, the industry functions well with the power imbalance between employee and employer.

5. Competence to act not just for employees: Not just employees need training to acquire knowledge and retain their positions, but organisations who train employees need aggregate of such knowledge in order to retain their positions in the social structure, to be relevant to compete and win contracts that pay them more. TD is a kind of reinforcement (Homans 1961).

6. Extrinsic reward should weigh more than intrinsic motivation

Petroleum workers are exposed to harsh weather, climate, risky and hazardous environments – conditions which are external and not under the control of the employee. Therefore, extrinsic rewards would do better in motivating these employees and so a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation where extrinsic rewards have greater percentage would produce optimal functioning than the reverse. This is more so given that the field engineer's shelf-life is lower than in industrial sectors with less-intensive and less-risky jobs so that before boredom or saturation with extrinsic reward sets in, the engineer may have changed job. In other industries it seems that minimized extrinsic rewards in favour of intrinsic motivation seem preferred (Ryan and Deci 2000b). The high level of risk exposure and strenuousness in the petroleum workers' activities may imply that most workers may not find it interesting but are pushing on because of the high expected reward for effort undertaken.

## **Appendix H**

### **OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT**



**Consent Form – Confidential data for the ‘HRM-Organisational Performance PhD Research’ project**

I understand that my participation in this PhD research project will involve interview(s) and response to questionnaires about my experiences and views of how HRM practices affect [Organization name]. It may require approximately an hour/ hour and a half of my time for each session. I understand that I may be requested to partake in up to two follow-up interviews over the course of the next three years, but that there is no obligation to partake in them.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw and/ or discuss my concerns with the researcher (details on the research participant information sheet).

I understand that the information provided by me may be audio-recorded and held confidentially, such that only the researcher and members of his team can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for up to 5 years when it will be deleted/destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time and, in accordance with the Data Protection Act, I can have access to the information at any time.

I understand that no personally-identifiable information about me will be used by the research team members in their dissemination of the research findings. I understand that the research findings will be disseminated through articles in professional publications and websites; and to the international academic community through conference papers and publications in academic journals and/ or books.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (*NAME*) consent to participate in the study conducted by the ‘HRM-Organisational Performance’ researcher from Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University.

Signed:

Date:

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