GRA 19502

Master Thesis

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1.0 Introduction to thesis

In this preliminary thesis report, we will present theory, antecedents and consequences of the variables we have chosen to do research on for our master thesis. First we present a thorough review of relevant literature to our topics, starting with HR-practices and HR-differentiation, the latter being our independent variable. Further, we discuss leader member exchange which is our moderator, followed by our independent variable, envy. After that, the objectives of our thesis are presented. We identify a gap in the literature by discussing former suggested areas for future research, and further explain how our thesis may fill this gap. Moreover our research question and hypotheses are questions followed by a short description of the method we plan to use, followed by a tentative plan for completion of the thesis.

2.0 Theory

2.1 HR-practices

Frequently included in discussions on high performance human resource practices is the concept of employee training (Blume, Ford, Baldwin & Huang, 2010; Noe & Tews, 2009). Human resources can be regarded as valuable and non-substitutable means for the organization to reach their objectives and competitive advantage by sharing and creating knowledge to develop intellectual capital (Noe & Tews, 2009). In the pursuit of success, companies might choose to differentiate in their HR practices, entailing that they apply HR practices differently across employees (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013).

2.1.1 Training and development

Training and development is an example of an HR practice. According to Goldstein and Ford (2002), training is a systematic way of describing learning and development to improve individual, team and overall organizational effectiveness. When talking about training, the concept of development is also often referred to as a similar aspect. This can be said to entail activities leading to new/increased knowledge or skills for personal growth (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). As these concepts are used interchangeably in literature, this report will in the following use *training* to cover both of them.

2.1.2 Benefits of training

Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) stress how the potential benefits of training can be traced on three levels; individual, organizational and societal. On the first level, increased knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), can lead to increased innovation, enhanced communication, empowerment, self-efficacy and well-being. On the organizational level, the focus is on how employees can use their KSAs to benefit the organization (Blume, Ford, Baldwin & Huang, 2010). This can be in terms of enhanced organizational performance, for example within sales, profitability, effectiveness, and other factors like reinforced organizational objectives, enhanced reputation and customer satisfaction (Aguinis & Kraiger 2009; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2010). When it comes to benefits on the societal level, researchers suggest that improving a nation's human capital contributes to economic growth (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Other researchers state that even though it may be tempting to conclude that training causes organizational performance, the causal direction of the HR-firm performance relationship is still unknown (Noe & Tews, 2009).

2.1.3 Types of training

Different types of training can be on the job training (OJT) with the use of e.g. role-playing and simulations, electronic learning using computer technology, mentoring and talent management programs (Spector 2012, Lewis & Heckman, 2006). T&D programs can also be divided in whether or not it is considered to be open for everyone, or exclusively for some employees (Sheehan & Anderson, 2015). Not only is training essential for new employees to learn how a job is done, but also important for developing current employees and improve performance (Spector, 2012). In some organizations, completing specific learning stages can be a way of qualifying for promotions, while others may use training programs as a way of rewarding high achievers for showed talent (Spector, 2012; Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

Noe (2008) states that diverse businesses strategies necessitates diverse human capital requirements and therefore place different demands on training. A business focusing on reducing costs should thus have a different training strategy than a company focusing on external growth (Noe & Tews, 2009). These differences in strategic value have along with the distinctiveness of occupational groups been

identified as key factors in in the design of HR systems and training (Noe & Tews, 2009; Lepak & Snell 2002).

2.1.4 HR-differentiation

Boxall and Purcell (2008) describe HR-practices as activities to manage employees and to increase value for the organization. The relationship between HR-practices and performance has been proven positively significant (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013; Combs, Liu, Hall & Ketchen. 2006). Standardizing HR-practices is often considered the norm for reasons like establishing trust, foster collaboration and increase predictability and stability (Greenberg, Roberge, Ho, Rousseau, 2004; Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013).

Differentiation, in terms of employee investment, was first suggested in 1999 (Lepak & Snell). To improve return on investment, Lepak and Snell (1999) suggested that differentiation between *individuals* should be done on the base of the employee's uniqueness in KSAs and thus contribution to the company's competitive advantage. Huselid, Becker and Beatty (2005) on the other hand, stresses how different units within an organization have different strategies and performance indicators, implying that differentiation *between units* would be necessary in order to generate wanted behavior.

Another approach to differentiation is through strategic talent management (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013). Talent management can be defined as a "comprehensive and integrated set of activities to ensure that the organization attracts, retains, motivates and develops the talented people it needs now and in the future" (Harrisr & Foster, 2010, p.423). This definition closely relates to the concept of differentiation as both focuses on giving some individuals opportunities that others do not receive.

Collings and Melahi (2009) state that it is important to "develop a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filing key positions with component incumbents (p.304). They stress how this will lead to organizational performance by enhancing commitment, motivation and extra-role behavior. Offering employees differing working conditions based on differences in performance and needs to attract, motivate and retain valuable talent, is necessary – especially in

competitive labor markets (Rousseau, 2005). However, the empirical work to verify the benefits of differentiation is scarce, and the research stating the beneficial outcomes of differentiation typically only focuses on the individual benefiting from it (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013). Marescaux, Winne and Sels (2013) states that this compromised view neglects the potential negative impact the differentiation might have on the colleagues who do not receive the same training, and thus might feel set back.

2.2 Leader Member Exchange (LMX)

2.2.1 The general theory

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995, p. 225) explain LMX with "that effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring". They further describe LMX as "how effective leadership relationships develop between dyadic "partners" in and between organizations (e.g., leaders and followers)" (p. 225). Research throughout the years has provided evidence for how the quality of the LMX relationship positively affects employee attitudes at work and how they perform (Erdogan and Bauer (2010). Furthermore, it is shown how a high quality LMX is related to fast advancement with regards to organizational and salary progression, in addition to a positive influence within the organization. This leads to low quality LMX being disadvantageous for its members.

2.2.2 Research

LMX theory was first created in the early 1970´s, with its prime researchers being Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975) and Graen and Cashman (1975). The entire approach to leadership being relationship-based started as a branch of what was first known as the *Vertical Dyad Linkage* (VDL) model of leadership (Schriesheim, Castro & Cogliser, 1999). The notion of the quality between employees and their LMX relationships being differentiated from each other is at the core of LMX theory (Anand, Hu, Liden & Vidyarthi, 2011). This leads to work-group members conducting social comparison between them, which may have an effect on how they perceive fairness in the group, and also further outcomes.

A body of research has been done on LMX differentiation, and although its ground theory resides at the group level, individual- and multi-level studies have also been conducted on this subject (Anand et al., 2011). *Individual level studies* seek to acquire each individual's perception of the level of differentiating the leader does between group members, and to what degree and what outcomes this has for the individual (Anand et al., 2011). Recent findings here indicate that differentiation should be avoided as high levels of it is shown to negatively affect factors such as group commitment, job satisfaction and employee well-being.

2.2.3 SLMX and ELMX

The original view on the LMX relationship between a leader and an individual follower is that it ranges from low-quality to high quality on a continuum (Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, Giles & Walker, 2007). The low-quality relationship is of a transactional kind, meaning it is solely based on the economic part of the work contract; the expectations of both leader and employee in terms of rewards and expectations linked to the job (Barbuto, 2005). On the other end, the high-quality LMX is based on mere social aspects in the relationship, such as mutual trust, respect, liking and influence (Bernert et al., 2007).

Furthermore, two different theoretical conceptualizations of LMX has emerged throughout research; the earlier mentioned VDL, and *social exchange theory*. Dienesch and Liden (1986) and Liden and Maslyn (1998) explain the former as how employees are tested by their leaders first in a series of episodes where they have to create and develop their own role at work, before their leader can allow them to engage in an exchange with them. However, social exchange theory views LMX entirely different, namely implying "as individuals act in ways that benefit others, an implicit obligation for future reciprocation is created" (Bernerth et al., 2007, p. 980). Moreover, it underlines how employees do not have to prove their role or competence before engaging in a relationship exchange with their leader.

With this said, Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik & Haerem (2012), propose a different way of viewing these two types of LMX. First and foremost, the social LMX is referred to as SLMX, and the transactional is referred to as ELMX (economic LMX). Rather than viewing them as opposite ends of a continuum, the mentioned

researchers present the two factors as two different types of relationships, each with their own set of qualities. Kuvaas et al.'s (2012) study demonstrated this as findings showed how an ELMX relationship negatively influenced work performance and employees willingness to do more than what is required of them (Buch & Kuvaas, 2016).

Further, the SLMX relationship in the study proved opposite, namely having a positive influence on the same variables. However, the researchers do state it may be likely that ELMX "may be effective under particular conditions, for instance when work is trivial and performance is easy to measure and monitor" (Kuvaas et al., 2012, p. 761). Buch, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2011) support this further, with their study showing how a SLMX relationship positively influenced affective commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, and with ELMX negatively influencing these mentioned variables. Based on these findings, arguments may be made for the fact that SLMX and ELMX may exist simultaneously, and that they are relationships pertaining of different qualities, although one may at times be the dominating one (Kuvaas et al., 2012).

2.2.4 The buffering role of the manager and LMX

Furthermore, the buffering role of the manager is relevant. Erdogan, Kraimer and Liden (2002) conducted a study showing that LMX acts as a buffer between Person-Organization fit and job satisfaction. When a high quality LMX relationship was present, the negative influence of a low P-O fit on job satisfaction was buffered. Moreover, a high P-O fit bettered the negative influence that a low-quality LMX relationship had on job satisfaction. Rosen, Harris and Kacmar (2011) showed how the role of the leader was important in the way employees reacted to their own justice perceptions. Finally, Kuvaas and Dysvik's study (2010) showed how high levels of employee's perceived supervisor support moderated the relationship between the perceived investment in employee development and measures of work performance (work effort, work quality and organizational citizenship behaviour). These findings may be suggestive of the importance of the line manager, and the importance of employees having good relationships with him/her.

2.3 Envy

Sapegina and Weibel (2017) talk about how competitive HR-practices trigger contrastive comparison, and how to this, envy is the immediate emotional response. Contrastive comparison happens when employees emphasize the differences between themselves and a colleague. Smith and Kim (2007, p. 47) define envy as an "unpleasant, often painful emotion produced by an awareness of another person or group of persons who enjoy a desired possession". Van De Ven, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2009, 2011, 2012) distinguish between two types of envy, *malicious* and *benign.* The former is envy towards a person who is in possession of outcomes one wishes to have. The latter is directed toward the envy object, and is not hostile, but rather increases the person's motivation to achieve the other person's object that one desires.

2.3.1 Antecedents and consequences of envy

The workplace can be an arena where feelings of envy and social comparison may arise, as individuals are exposed to differing events like recognition and praise, promotions, pay increases, bonuses etc (Schaubroeck and Lam 2004). Envy can be described as a negative and painful emotion. Studies show how negative emotions can have an adverse impact on job satisfaction and the psychological well-being of employees (e.g., Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2005). Malicious envy has been shown to be strongly linked to counterproductive behaviors directed towards coworkers, e.g. in the form of social loafing or acts of harm or sabotage towards the better-off peers. (e.g., Cohen-Charash, 2009; Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Moran & Schweitzer, 2008).

Considering the outcomes of envy, several researchers suggest that the self-evaluation of an envious individual is threatened by the relative advantage of peers (Smith and Kim, 2007), and may lead to an increase turnover intention (Vecchio, 2000). Further, research has shown that envy may even lead to knowledge hiding as it reduces the extent to which the the envier is willing to share high-quality knowledge with the envied peer (Fischer, Kastenmüller, Frey (Peus, 2009) and thus increases efforts to undermine them (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002; Mouly and Sankaran, 2002).

2.3.2 Social comparison

Veiga, Baldridge and Markóczy (2014) talk about how a cognitive assessment occurs as a result of when an employee perceives a threat to their social standing. This process begins with envy, and further involves one employee engaging in a social comparison of what another employee has that he/she does not. Further, the cognitive assessment is centered on how the envious employee perceives the co-workers' advantage as a threat to his/her own organizational status. Social comparisons generally occur when individuals compare their own situations to others. Goodman and Hasiley (2007) explain how when related to the workplace, social comparison is used to evaluate one's progress and contributions relative to the ones of colleagues. It is additionally used to deal with one's own uncertainties, especially when a perceived threat to the social standing has occurred, which is actually a factor that increases the use of social comparison (Buunk, Schaufeli and Ybema 1994) Accordingly, individuals in the work context use social comparison on achievement criteria that all members of the organization are aware of is relevant to their own social standing (Nozick, 1974). Because organizational members are constantly striving to attain and/or maintain their social standing at work, social comparison occurs a lot in the cognitive assessment of work related events (Veiga, Baldridge & Markóczy, 2014).

3.0 Objectives of the thesis

Based on the presented theory, some areas for future research can be identified. With regards to differentiation, prior research has almost solely focused on the benefits that employees receive from HR-differentiation (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013). However, seen through the lens of social comparison theory, it is suggested that differentiation may also have negative effects on the co-workers who do not receive the training, advantage, etc. on the basis of how it might create perceptions of being unfavorably treated. In other words, differentiation is argued to be a double edged sword, which is an area yet to be explored (Marescaux, Winne & Sels, 2013). Sheehan and Anderson (2015) propose how future research should investigate the effects of talent management, and how its exclusivity might lead to negative effects on the individual level with regards to factors such as social inclusion and equal opportunity.

In the area of LMX, Anand et al. (2011) argues that more research needs to be done on the consequences of individual LMX quality. Furthermore, Bernerth et al. (2007) highlight the social exchange nature of LMX (SLMX) when suggesting areas for future research. Kuvaas and Dysvik (2010) talk about how future research should investigate LMX in the moderating role between perceptions of HR-practices and employee outcomes. They also suggest how the moderating role of employee's perceptions of their managers should be investigated, with regards to the relationship between HR-practices and employee outcomes. With regards to suggested future research on envy, Veiga, Baldridge and Markóczy (2014) argue that high levels of LMX quality may reduce envy and its impact. They further argue how fair treatment related to HR-differentiation is important in minimizing negative emotions.

3.1 Research question

Based on the discussed areas for future research, we clearly see a gap in literature that opens up for the research we are interested in conducting. As it has been suggested to look at HR-differentiation's negative effects on employee outcomes, we are interested in looking at it on an individual level with regards to specifically training as the HR-practice. The employee outcome we want to investigate is envy, based on prior research suggesting that differentiation can lead to negative emotions and perceptions of being unfairly treated. This, in addition to what has previously been said about how social comparison may lead to envy, makes it interesting for us to see envy as the employee outcome. Moreover, the social exchange nature of LMX has been suggested as the moderating role in future research, specifically between the relationship of HR-practices and employee outcomes. Based on this, we want to investigate whether LMX (SLMX and ELMX) has a moderating effect. Because previous research has shown opposite effects between SLMX and ELMX we want to contrast and compare the moderating effects of these two.

Our suggested research question is therefore:
To what extent does individual HR-differentiation influence envy, and does LMX quality buffer this impact?

Based on our research question, our independent variable is HR-differentiation between individuals, with focus on training. Our moderator is LMX (SLMX & ELMX), and our dependent variable is envy.
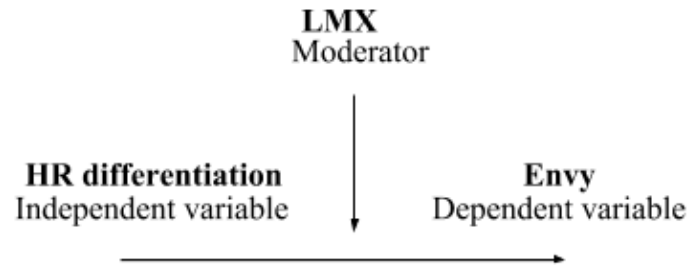
With basis in the previously mentioned theory of social comparison, we believe that individual HR-differentiation and envy will have a positive correlation. Furthermore, based on previous research we believe that SLMX will buffer the influence of HR differentiation on envy. We also believe that ELMX will not buffer the influence of HR differentiation on envy. This gives rise to the following hypotheses.

3.2 Hypotheses

H₁: When HR-differentiation occurs on an individual level, envy will increase.

H₂: When HR-differentiation occurs on an individual level, a high quality SLMX relationship will buffer the influence of HR differentiation on envy.

H₃: When HR-differentiation occurs on an individual level, a high quality ELMX relationship will not buffer the influence of high HR differentiation on envy.

4.0 Method

We will use quantitative method to conduct this research. We will send out surveys to a company. Ideally we want to gather information regarding our independent variable from an HR department. To measure the LMX relationship

we will gather data both from employees and from their managers. We split the sources to avoid common method bias. Furthermore, the data regarding the dependent variable will be gathered from employees. Ideally, we wish to work with an organization with a minimum of 150 employees. We want to conduct the study on an individual level.

5.0 Tentative plan for completion of thesis

January

Week 2: Preliminary report due

Week 3: Feedback from supervisor

Week 4: Adjust thesis after feedback

February

Week 5: Investigate companies

Week 6: Investigate companies

Week 7: Finish theory

Week 8: Finish theory - meeting with supervisor

March

Week 9: Make survey

Week 10: Further writing

Week 11: Wait for survey results

Week 12: Wait for survey results

April

Week 13: Easter holiday

Week 14: Preparing for lectures, finishing survey, meeting supervisor

Week 15: GRA2236 - Creativity in Organizations lectures

Week 16: Preparing for finals, analyzing data

Week 17: Preparing for finals, analyzing data

May

Week 18: Finals

Week 19: Finals

Week 20: SPSS

Week 21: SPSS

June

Week 22: Further work on data,

Week 23: Further work on data, meeting supervisor

Week 24: Discussion

Week 25: Discussion

Week 26: Finish discussion part

July

Week 27: First draft finished

Week 28

Week 29

Week 30

August

Week 31: Second draft finished

Week 32

Week 33: Final version finished

Week 34: Final adjustments

September

Week 35: Delivery week!

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