

Resumé

De seneste år har vi været vidne til, at et stadig stigende antal virksomheder vælger at sammenlægge deres HR- og kommunikationsafdelinger. Vi mener, at denne tendens har skabt en positivt ladet diskurs, der italesætter et løfte om, at HR og kommunikation tilsammen kan skabe synergi, hvilket betragtes som nødvendigt for at kunne øge organisatorisk performance. Denne afhandling har således til formål at undersøge, hvilken indvirkning denne diskurs har på en given virksomhed. Med udgangspunkt i kritisk diskursanalyse søger vi at besvare, hvordan diskursen bliver konstrueret og spredt, hvordan den bliver opfattet af den sammenlagte afdelings medarbejdere, samt hvilken betydning konstruktionen og opfattelserne af diskursen har, på et praktisk såvel som på et teoretisk plan.

Vores analyse viser, at den omtalte diskurs fremsætter en række "sandheder" og at den i den givne virksomhed bliver konstrueret på en grundlæggende normativ måde, der opstiller idealer for, hvordan den perfekte HR- og kommunikationsafdeling skal se ud. Vi viser hvordan medarbejdernes opfattelser af diskursen både reproducerer og udfordrer den. Undervejs illustrerer vi, hvordan konstruktionen, såvel som opfattelserne af diskursen, er påvirket af kontekstuelle faktorer, såsom sociale strukturer, organisatoriske diskurser og ideologier, samt magtrelationer. På baggrund af analysen diskuterer vi, hvilke praktiske implikationer vores resultater har for virksomheden og dens medarbejdere, herunder hvordan diskursen ser ud til at skabe forvirring, konkurrence mellem funktionerne og fremtvinger et fokus på forskelle, som får medarbejderne til at opfatte disse som problematiske. Følgeligt diskuterer vi, hvordan analysens resultater kan bidrage til vores teoretiske forståelse af forholdet mellem HR og kommunikation, samt hvordan vi på et meta-niveau kan bidrage til den eksisterende litteratur om *management fashions*.

Afhandlingen konkluderer, at den omtalte diskurs ikke nødvendigvis bliver opfattet af medarbejderne på samme måde, som den bliver forsøgt konstrueret af ledelsen, og at opfattelserne af diskursen har en række utilsigtede virkninger, som på en og samme tid udfordrer diskursen og tilskriver den ny mening.

Key Words: *Human Resources, Communications, discourse, employee perceptions, management fashion*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Identification

In recent years, we have witnessed an increase in the number of Danish companies that combine their Human Resources and Communications departments. With regard to this recent development, the question arises why this particular constellation has gained such popularity. The most evident reason, it seems, is that the combining of these departments in a company makes an organisation more apt to perform in today's business environment (Rosholm, 2012). Communications specialists from both companies and consultancies argue that one can not only save money by merging the functions - Human Resources (HR) and Communications also bring different strengths to the table that complement each other well (Holmgård, 2011). Traditionally, the primary area of expertise in HR is people processes, such as leadership development, measuring employee satisfaction, and recruitment and retention needs, whereas Communications is said to be experts when it comes to positioning, delivering messages, and utilising the appropriate communication channels (Holmgård & Rendtorff, 2012). As such, by being merged with Communications, HR's initiatives should become more rooted in the organisation because they will know how to target their audience (Rosholm, 2012). For Communications, then, the benefit is that they get access to the processes and people that HR usually manages (Ibid.). Overall, there seems to be an expectation that if the functions are merged, collaboration between them is supposed to be enhanced, ultimately resulting in synergies that would not otherwise have been possible (Brix, 2009; Holmgård & Rendtorff, 2012; Robson, 2012). Though a few note how it may take some time for HR and Communications to find a common ground and reach a mutual understanding (e.g. Holmgård & Rendtorff, 2012), the general perception seems to be that once the two learn how to collaborate on various tasks the benefits outweigh possible challenges.

The list of companies that have combined their HR and Communications departments around or in the years following the recent Financial Crisis counts a number of large Danish companies such as Coloplast, Danmarks Radio, KMD, Tryg, and Danske Bank (Holmgård, 2011). The trend has probably emerged as a response to the insecurity and instability that have since come to characterise the job market. Mumby (2013) notes that today's business environment is characterised by a lack of trust, loyalty, and commitment between organisations and its employees – values that were once shared reciprocally by both parties. Consequently, it seems that concepts such as *employer branding* and *corporate reputation*, *change management*, and *leadership development* have become big themes (Martin et al., 2011; Nasim & Sushil, 2011; Edwards et al., 2013), and companies are trying to find

better ways of attracting new employees and retaining and developing the current ones. Additionally, companies devote a considerable amount of time and resources on handling changes, developing leaders, and creating an environment that fosters motivated and satisfied employees that can contribute to a positive corporate reputation. These are allegedly all areas that a combined HR and Communications department can contribute to and thereby increase organisational performance (Holmgård & Rendtorff, 2012).

It appears, then, that the idea of combining HR and Communications departments, and the supposed benefits that companies can gain from it, has become a quite popular topic among consultants and company leaders on online specialist communities and in periodicals. We find this highly interesting as we both study organisational communication, but work in HR departments, and thus we find ourselves in the intersection between the HR and communication disciplines. Consequently, this thesis wishes to explore what happens in an organisation when an HR and Communications constellation is verbalised in this way.

Although the merging of HR and Communications departments has been a much discussed topic among consultants and communication specialists, the issue seems somewhat absent from academic discourse. If the issue is discussed, it limits itself primarily to the study of the relationship between internal communication and HR. Generally, the view of this relationship is one where the two functions should be kept separate but still collaborate closely. One proponent of this view is Argenti (1996) who acknowledges the close relationship between HR and Communications and suggests that there should be close collaboration between the head of each area in order to ensure that each department's communicative goals are met, as well as to maintain open lines of communication between what he considers to be two critical functional areas in a company. Similarly, Dolphin (2004) argues that HR and communication skills should be brought together for strategic advantage; however, it is important that the Communications department asserts its legitimacy by reclaiming responsibility for all communication in the employee setting. Yet, more often than not, internal communication is viewed as a subset of HR, the assumption being that the HR department has a greater comprehension of what the organisational members need and want (Coric & Vokic, 2009). Vercic et al. (2012) regard this assumption as problematic and argue that internal communication is actually a separate field in practice that deserves a department of its own.

The discussion of the relationship between HR and Communications is likely to have arisen due to the blurred lines that exist between the two functions. As Coric & Vokic (2009) note, the departments often have the same mission, for example working towards getting people to participate and be involved in the achievement of organisational goals.

Common to these studies is that they are mainly discussing where the disciplines belong on the organisational chart. That the two fields are perceived by some as being closely related and should therefore collaborate is thus nothing new, but the general approach to studying the relationship between HR and Communications is predominantly functionalist and the topic is primarily treated on a theoretical level. We find that something is missing in this discussion; the way that the idea of merging HR and Communications affect organisations and its members. That is, rather than to reflect on whether the two ought to be merged or not, we believe that it is important to understand how this popular idea may influence and even change organisational reality as it may have implications for organisational members belonging to these functions. Therefore, our purpose is to generate new ideas that can contribute to our understanding of the relationship between HR and communication.

What is more, we argue that merging HR and Communications departments can be considered a popular management idea. Considering the instability of today's business environment, it is not surprising that companies are tempted to merge the departments, as it clearly promises to change the organisation for the better. Along these lines, Giddens (1991) argues that "people will radically alter the ways in which they live their lives on the basis of ('expert') knowledge and information about those processes" (in Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 360). Seeing as many companies have decided to merge their HR and Communications departments, this indicates that organisations, much like people, are willing to make changes based on popular management ideas.

A field of research that is concerned with the study of such popular management ideas is the field of *management fashion theory*. Scholars within this tradition are interested in studying popular management ideas and the ways in which organisations relate to and act towards these (Røvik, 2011). Such ideas are referred to as *management fashions* because management ideas are thought of as resembling trends in the fashion industry (Ibid.) that experience rapid growth followed by a sharp decline in attention (Heusinkveld & Benders, 2012). One of the most well-known articles is Abrahamson (1996) which argues that norms of rationality and progress regulate managerial behaviour, making managers adopt management techniques that are the most efficient means to

important ends. These techniques do not stay around for long; managers should switch to newer and better techniques when they are available in order to create organisational progress (Ibid.). Consequently, Abrahamson defines a *management fashion* as a “relatively transitory collective belief disseminated by management fashion setters [consulting firms, management gurus, business mass media publications, and business schools], that a management technique leads rational management progress” (1996, p. 257). This definition accentuates the power of fashion setters, meaning that managers seem to adopt their ideas as long as these appear rational.

Three topics have more or less been the focus of attention in research on management ideas and practices. First of all, researchers have sought to explain the form in which these management ideas are presented by fashion setters (Heusinkveld et al., 2011). Secondly and relating to the first issue, researchers have looked into the defining role that is attributed to individual fashion setters and the types of networks through which management ideas are disseminated (Ibid.). Lastly, researchers have paid attention to the life cycles through which the production of ideas and practices tends to proceed (Ibid.). Such research with Abrahamson as the main source of inspiration has since been criticised for having a productionist view on management ideas, meaning that it does not take into consideration how consumers of management ideas are not passive actors, but rather constitutive in shaping organisational practice (Heusinkveld et al., 2011). Many researchers have focused on the creation and promotion of management ideas by management fashion setters, while the consumption and organisational implications of management ideas remains a relatively understudied area (Sturdy, 2004; ten Bos & Heusinkveld, 2009).

To overcome this productionist view, Heusinkveld et al. (2011) advances the concept of co-consumption in order to highlight the interaction between production and consumption of management ideas from a consumption perspective. With this, they bring the active consumer into focus, and suggest that managers are both co-producers and co-consumers of fashionable management ideas, and that consumption may coincide with or even (re-)start the production of an idea (Ibid.). While this contributes to an enhanced understanding of how ideas impact organisations, the focus remains primarily on managers thereby excluding how employees may play a role in this co-consumption as well. Some scholars have attempted to highlight the consequences of adopting fashionable ideas on employees, for instance by showing how ideas may generate contrasting attitudes (e.g. Noon et al., 2000; Borial, 2003), and how they may be met with resistance, putting management in a position

where they cannot control employee consumption (e.g. Kelemen, 2000; McCabe, 2011). Yet, such studies remain scarce, and therefore another aim of this thesis is to further our understanding of how a management fashion impacts an organisation by exploring how employees perceive the fashionable idea of merging HR and Communications. Thus, with this thesis, we aim to contribute to an understudied area in existing management fashion literature.

Recently, some scholars have challenged the term *fashion* as an appropriate metaphor or term for popular management ideas because it does not capture or help explain the multifaceted ways in which such an idea is implicated in social reality (Whittle, 2008; Røvik, 2011). We adhere to the view of Whittle (2008) who argues that the term *discourse* is much more appropriate because it explains how texts, ideas, and practices affect the way we socially construct our reality. She argues that discourses shape the way we make sense of, relate to and act upon the world around us, and that the term discourse helps examine the process through which notions of rational knowledge or “truth” is constructed (Ibid.). Thus, the term discourse highlights how the idea is not just passively constructed but also actively constructs social reality, and as such, we label the talk around merging HR and Communications departments *the HRCOM discourse* when we refer to this broader societal phenomenon.

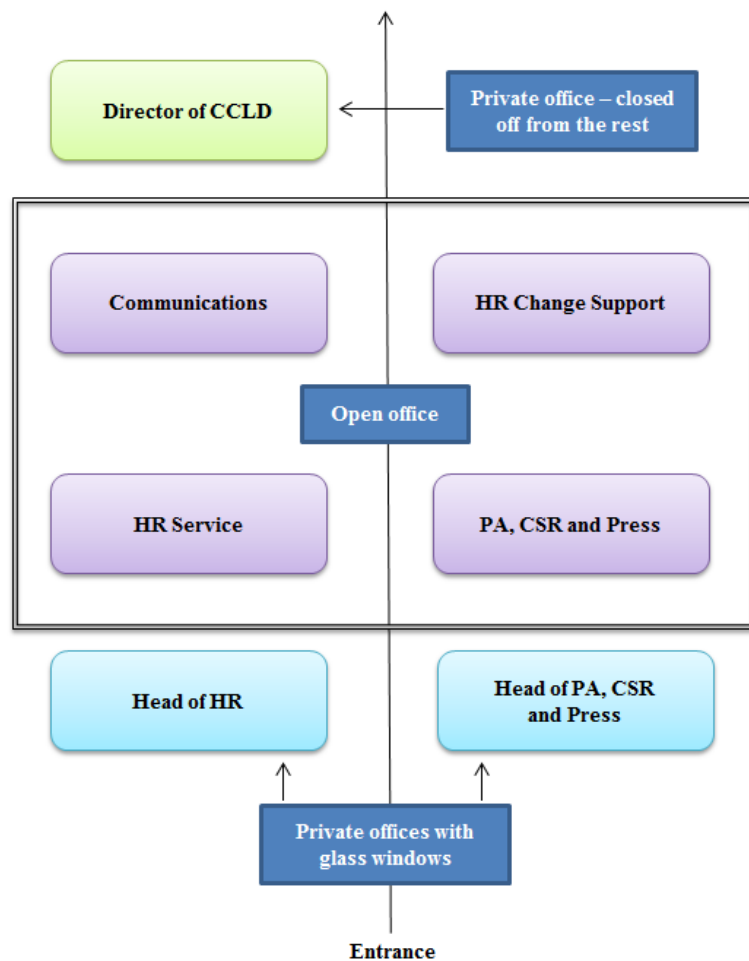
As evident from the above discussion, the existing pool of literature is inadequate in explaining the HRCOM discourse. Consequently, in order for us to explore this discourse, we have to enhance our knowledge empirically and delve into an organisation where this discourse is present. In the following, we briefly present the organisation which forms the empirical foundation for this thesis. Further explanation for the choice of case organisation follows in the methods section.

1.2 Company Presentation

The empirical case for this thesis is Copenhagen Pension Group¹ (CPG), a large Danish pension company that focuses on the business-to-business market and is one of the biggest players on the Danish market. The company employs approximately 1200 people, most of them located at the headquarters in Copenhagen. Overall, the company is doing well, both in terms of financial performance as well as according to the company’s employee satisfaction surveys.

¹ The name of the company has been changed to protect the identities of organisational members.

Since January 2009, the company’s HR and Communications departments have been merged and named Corporate Communications and Leadership Development (our translation, hereinafter referred to as CCLD or “the department”). The department counts 26 people, and is headed by CPG’s former Director of Communications who refers directly to the CEO. There are four teams in the department placed in an open office landscape, and each team has its own team leader, as illustrated in figure 1 below.



*Figure 1 –
CCLD
Department
Overview*

1.3 Research Question

Having established the area of focus for this thesis, we arrive at the following research question:

How is the HRCOM discourse constructed and diffused in CPG, what are organisational members' perceptions of this discourse, and what are the implications of how it is constructed, diffused, and perceived?

In order to explicate the intent of our research question, we choose to break it down into three sub-questions which are presented below.

1) How is the HRCOM discourse constructed and diffused in CPG?

We wish to explore how the discourse is constructed, that is, what the discourse consists of in CPG. We also wish to explore how the discourse is diffused – if at all – in the organisation. As such, we seek to explore how the HRCOM discourse may come to shape organisational reality by the way it is constructed and diffused.

2) How do employees in CCLD perceive the HRCOM discourse as it is constructed in CPG?

Asking this question allows us to explore the ways in which the employees perceive the HRCOM discourse, which in turn enable us to uncover what power the discourse holds over them. The main aim is to discover whether employees accept it or whether they challenge it, and whether it is possible to identify other discourses emerging as a response, as well as other factors that seem to have an impact on how organisational members perceive the HRCOM discourse.

3) What are the implications of how the HRCOM discourse is constructed, diffused, and perceived in CPG?

With this question we intend to discuss the findings of the previous two questions and explore what practical implications these findings may have for the organisation and its members. In addition, we wish to discuss how our findings contribute to enhance our theoretical understanding of an HR and Communications constellation.

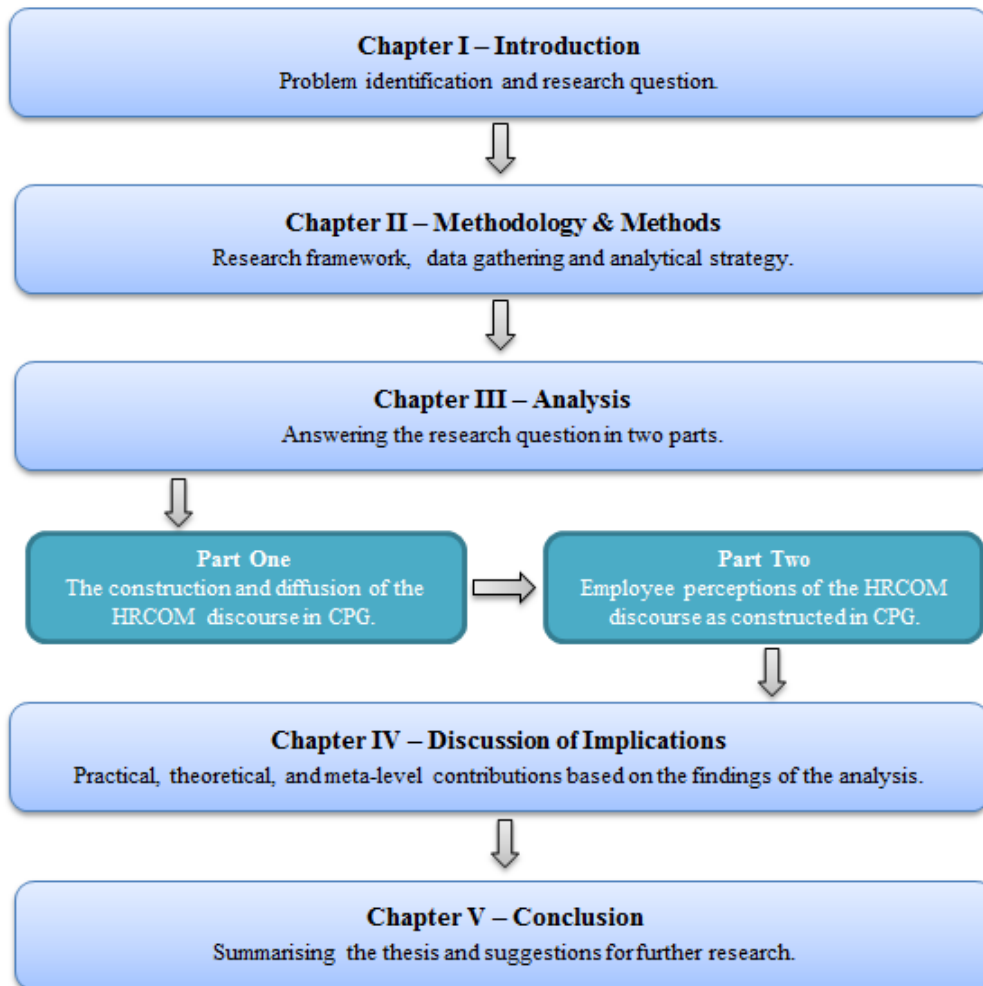
1.4 Thesis Design

Having identified the topic of the thesis and presented our research questions on the previous pages, we move on to chapter two wherein we explicate; first, the methodological foundation, which is grounded in social constructionism and critical discourse analysis; second, our methodical reflections, including research design and data gathering methods; and third, our strategy for analysing the data.

Following this, in chapter three, which consists of two parts, we attempt to answer our research question. In part one of the analysis, we delve into how the HRCOM discourse is constructed and diffused in CPG. In part two, we analyse how the HRCOM discourse as constructed in CPG is perceived by organisational members, that is, we look into how it is reproduced and challenged. Throughout the analysis, we consider how relations of power and other contextual factors play a role shaping the construction, diffusion and perception of the HRCOM discourse as it is constructed in CPG. Each part of the analysis is summarised in a sub-conclusion.

In chapter four, we discuss the implications of the findings of our analysis. First, we look into the practical implications for the organisation and its members and point to factors the organisation needs to pay attention to going forward. Second, we explore how the findings of the analysis enhance our theoretical implications of an HR and Communications constellation. Third, we take a step back and illustrate how all of these findings contribute to a broader understanding of how a management fashion is produced and consumed in an organisation, particularly from an employee perspective.

Finally, in chapter five, we conclude the thesis by summarising our findings, and in doing this we offer a model which demonstrates how each part of the thesis is closely interrelated. In extension of this, we provide suggestions for further research.



*Figure 2 –
Thesis
Design*

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

&

METHODS

Methodology & Methods

In this chapter, we account for the methodology of the thesis, the chosen methods for gathering data as well as the strategy for analysing the data. All of these aspects are linked together, and as such we aim to give the reader a good overview of the ways in which they interrelate and what they mean for our research question. To begin with, we present our methodology which draws on social constructionism and critical discourse analysis. We then introduce the methods we have used for gathering empirical material, as well as reflect on ethical issues. Finally, we discuss methodological limitations and present our analytical strategy for how we work with the empirical material.

2.1 Social Constructionism

In our research question lie a number of underlying philosophical assumptions which are important to explicate as they influence both our methods for gathering empirical material and the subsequent analysis. As mentioned, the purpose of our research is to explore how the HRCOM discourse is constructed and diffused through everyday communicative practices in a particular organisational reality. Additionally, we are interested in understanding how organisational members perceive the HRCOM discourse in order to explain in what way the HRCOM discourse influences organisational reality. By constructing the research question in this way, it points to at least three underlying assumptions. First of all, when we talk about how discourses can be *constructed*, we imply that reality cannot be grasped from an objective standpoint because it is constructed in the social interaction between people, thus entailing that our understanding of the world will always be subjective. Secondly, by emphasising discourses, we stress the importance of *language* in the construction of social reality as discourses in its most basic sense can be thought of as “sets of statements that bring social objects into being” (Grant & Hardy, 2003). Lastly, in using the word *perception* we imply that what people think and feel is of key importance in order to enhance our understanding of any given situation. Hence, human interests can be said to be the main drivers of our research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). All of these underlying assumptions suggest that our research question embodies a social constructionist view – a paradigm which merits further explanation here, both in terms of its key arguments, and its implications for gathering data.

The social constructionist paradigm advances the argument that language is a key element in the construction of the way we think and act, meaning that language becomes constitutive of reality (Wenneberg, 2002). Hence, language is not a mere tool for thinking, but a prerequisite for human thought, or in other words, language and its concepts determine what we are able to think (Ibid.). This does not mean that we believe nothing exists outside of language; rather our knowledge of the world is determined by both physical and social factors (Ibid.). This entails that our data needs to be gathered in a way that give us the possibility of exploring how language and structure are co-producers of reality, including how organisational members talk about the HRCOM discourse and other discourses relevant to their lives.

A second point of interest in the social constructionist view is that it claims that reality is shaped by our intersubjective meaning construction (Rasborg, 2004), and as such our knowledge and perceptions are never a direct reflection of reality, but always an interpretation of it (Wenneberg, 2002). Hence, a basic condition for conducting research in this manner is that we can never relate to the material objectively; rather our understanding of the HRCOM discourse and its implications occur through our own lens of interpretation. The goal of our research, then, is not to look for one objective truth about the HRCOM discourse, but rather several subjective ‘truths’ that can provide us with insight into the ways that the HRCOM discourse is constructed, diffused and perceived.

Lastly, another central claim of social constructionism is that social phenomena are created through historical and social processes, consequently making them subject to change (Rasborg, 2004). This means that we question the “naturalness” of the HRCOM discourse and instead we view it as a product of the social and cultural context in which it is created. Thus, we do not take its existence for granted, but instead we attempt to dive beneath the surface, and explore how it has come into being.

2.2 A Discourse Perspective

In this thesis, we approach our research questions by taking a discourse-oriented perspective. The term “discourse” is extremely polysemous and therefore it needs further explanation. When we use the term discourse, we draw on Fairclough’s (1992) definition of the term which entails viewing language as a form of social practice. This means that discourse is a mode of action, one form in which people may act upon the world and each other, as well as a representation of the world (Ibid.). It also implies that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure, that is, discourse is a practice,

not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning (Ibid.). In other words, the HRCOM discourse can be thought of as a collective frame of understanding that legitimises and motivates certain actions. In turn, these actions feed back into the discourse and thus have the potential for changing it. Hence, organisational reality both shape and is shaped by the HRCOM discourse.

Understanding discourses in this way helps us grasp how certain beliefs and truths that govern an organisation are not natural but rather a result of discursive activity (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Bearing this in mind, we wish to unveil not only the clear, but also the opaque aspects that the HRCOM discourse brings about. This becomes necessary due to our aim of explaining how the HRCOM discourse may be constructed in a certain way, thereby creating beliefs and truths that may or may not be accepted by organisational members. Considering all of this, we undoubtedly take a critical stance in our thesis why we in the following turn to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and explain how this view on discourse is beneficial towards answering our research question.

2.3 A Critical Agenda

Critical Discourse Analysis may be defined as being “fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). Put differently, the purpose of CDA is to critically investigate social inequality as it is for example expressed, signalled, constituted, and legitimized by language use (Wodak, 2001). CDA explores why a discourse is used in a particular way and what implications this kind of use brings about (Paltridge, 2006), and it helps us to zoom in on not just how the HRCOM discourse is constructed and diffused, but also how relations of power play an important role in this. In the following, we present five key principles of CDA and explain their relevance for this thesis.

2.3.1 The Dialectical Relationship between Discourse and Social Structure

Key to CDA is its focus on the dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and all the diverse elements of the situations, institutions, and social structures which frame it (Fairclough et al., 2011). That is, it is only possible to make sense of the significance of discourse in social processes if

we acknowledge that discourse and structure is mutually constitutive (Ibid.). Taking such a view highlights the equal importance of both discourse and structure in shaping reality, and thereby we

[...] avoid the pitfalls of overemphasizing on the one hand the social determination of discourse, and on the other hand the construction of the social in discourse. The former turns discourse into a mere reflection of a deeper social reality, the latter idealistically represents discourse as the source of the social. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 65)

This means that as we study the HRCOM discourse, it is not sufficient to look at discursive practices; we also need to consider elements such as relationships between people in the organisation, work routines, and the organisational setup that in turn help constitute the discourse. At the same time, these social structures play a role in how organisational members perceive their reality and as such must be treated accordingly.

2.3.2 Power Relations as Discursive

CDA focuses on how discursive activity plays a role in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) and argues that acts of discourse are always engaged in that they realise the interests, the positions, the perspectives and values of those that enact them (Paltridge, 2006). However, CDA also assumes that “power is not always exerted through obviously abusive acts of domination, but rather more pervasively through hegemony, that is, by securing consent on laws, rules, norms, and habits that reflect unequal power relations” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997 in Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). In other words, power relations are often subtle and less visible – both for those who enact it and those who are affected by it. As such, an aim of CDA is to reveal some of these hidden and often out of sight values, positions, and perspectives (Paltridge, 2006). Thus, CDA can help us to uncover how the HRCOM discourse is constructed in a certain way through processes that are never neutral, but always entangled with power as well as how the discourse may be used strategically, and constructed accordingly, to advance own agendas and secure desired positions. It can also shed light on how the discourse can be hegemonic in that organisational members may find it natural and thus not recognise the power relations exerted through it.

Inherent to CDA is also the assumption that discourse is not powerful on its own, but rather it gains power through powerful people’s employment of it (Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Consequently, it appears

that the HRCOM discourse is not powerful in itself, but becomes powerful when organisational members make use of it. At the same time, discourses can be used to “challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term” (Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 15). This highlights that several discourses may compete for dominance simultaneously, though some discourses may come to dominate – a dominance which is secured through an ongoing struggle of meaning between various discourses (Grant & Hardy, 2003). In this lies the possibility for resistance as discourses are continually reproduced or transformed through everyday communicative practices (Ibid.). Since we examine the HRCOM discourse in this thesis, the underlying assumption is that this is currently a dominating discourse in the organisation. Viewing the discourse from a CDA perspective affords us to see that organisational members may help to reproduce the HRCOM discourse but that they may also produce other discourses that challenge it, which in turn contributes to a deeper appreciation of how the discourse is constructed as well as how it affects organisational reality.

2.3.3 Discourse and Ideology

Another aim of CDA is to decipher ideologies in order to demystify discourses. In its most basic sense, ideology can be viewed as “a set of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 10). More precisely, we can understand ideologies as “particular ways of representing and constructing society which reproduce unequal relations of power, relations of domination and exploitation” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 371). Examples of such ways of representing and constructing society are individualism, equality of opportunity, feminism, and ecology. It is important to emphasise that individuals may not always be aware of the ideologies that influence them (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). In fact, ideologies can be so deeply ingrained in our ways of thinking and communicating that we take them for granted as self-evident (Ibid.), meaning that they can be very difficult to challenge as they become naturalised. However, according to Fairclough (1992), the importance of ideology should not be overestimated; he argues that since ideological struggles are always part of discursive practice, there is potential for changing dominant ideologies. CDA thus seeks to explicate those aspects of (often hidden) ideology that underpin social interaction (Bloor & Bloor, 2007).

CDA helps us to understand that most discourses are based on ideological aspects, and that ideologies - both organisational and societal - may be used as a form of more or less conscious justification for the

diffusion of a discourse. This further increases our understanding of how discourses are constructed, and how they can be used to maintain unequal power relations by getting the consent of organisational members. As such, it makes us aware that the language used in the construction of the HRCOM discourse may reflect ideological ideals, making the discourse difficult but not impossible to challenge. Consequently, determining this requires attention to how the discourse is interpreted and received by organisational members.

2.3.4 Discourses and Context

A central part of CDA is the attention to the context of a discourse, the reason being that we simply cannot understand discourses without acknowledging that these are always produced in a specific context (Fairclough et al., 2011). In any given context, a discourse is always linked to previously-, synchronically-, and subsequently-produced discourses (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Thus, in order to understand why the HRCOM discourse is constructed the way it is, we need to pay attention to other discourses in the organisation on which the discourse draws, as well other organisation-specific characteristics that help shape it. Moreover, discourses may be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on its context and audience, especially because people always make sense of discourses through the lens of feelings, beliefs, values, and knowledge (Fairclough et al., 2011). Hence, context becomes of key importance when attempting to understand how and why organisational members perceive the HRCOM discourse as they do, and why some organisational members interpret the discourse differently than others.

2.3.5 Discourses as a Form of Social Action

Finally, CDA views itself as a form of social action in that it aims to uncover the opaqueness and power relationships that are entangled in the production and use of discourses (Fairclough et al., 2011). That is, analysing discourses has an emancipatory agenda due to the focus on, for instance, giving voice to the voiceless and exposing power abuse (Blommaert, 2005). Besides this, CDA advocates for “[...] intervention in the social practices it critically investigates. [...] CDA should make proposals for change and suggest corrections to particular discourses. CDA thus openly professes strong commitments to change, empowerment, and practice-orientedness.” (Ibid., p. 25-26).

In taking on a critical discourse perspective, we act as a vehicle for employees by affording them an opportunity to speak their mind about the HRCOM discourse and how it affects them. Additionally, while we may not directly make proposals for change, we do aim to make visible the hidden aspects and implications of the discourse that management may not be aware of – for the benefit of both the organisation and its members.

2.4 Methods

In this section, we present the various methods applied in our research, as well as account for their usefulness in terms of answering the research question.

2.4.1 An Inductive Approach

We can approach our research question in different ways. One way is using a deductive approach where focus is on testing hypotheses based on theory (Ankersborg & Boolsen, 2007). The theoretical framework guides the gathering of empirical material, and thus the deductive researcher gathers the data after having decided on which theories to apply in the study. One of the limitations is that the researcher possibly becomes too focused on looking for certain elements instead of being open to what the data might reveal. Another approach is the inductive one where the researcher is more open and explorative in the gathering process by not having any presumed expectations (Ankersborg & Boolsen, 2007). Though we argue that we can never avoid being influenced by our subjective interpretations of the world - and nor do we attempt to – our methods for gathering data are guided by an inductive approach as we attempt to maintain an open and explorative approach.

2.4.2 Research Design

As argued, discourses are inherently social, that is, they come into being through social interaction, and social interaction is always situated in local contexts of practice (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Therefore, we argue that the most suitable way to study the HRCOM discourse is in a local context of an organisation where it is present. In other words, our research question can be best answered by employing a particular case that allows us to study the discourse in-depth, and thus can provide us with a rich picture of life and behaviour in an organisation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

As our primary aim is to understand the HRCOM discourse, the case becomes an instrument for giving us insight into how the broader discourse is constructed, diffused and perceived in an organisational reality. Stake (1995) refers to this kind of research design as an *instrumental case study* because the case itself is not what is of particular interest; rather it is the discourse that is of primary concern to the study. However, it is important to note that this does not mean we do not take the context of the case company - and consequently the context of the discourse - into consideration in our analysis. As accounted for, context plays a significant role in the methodological framework of this thesis as it views discourses as being context-dependent and thus discourses can only be understood in relation to other discourses as well as the environment in which it occurs.

The most important criterion for us when choosing a case was that it had to be a company in which we knew the discourse was in play and where it had an influence on everyday organisational life. As such, we did not consider the industry or type of business to be of particular importance for our choice. CPG caught our interest because the company is known for having merged its HR and Communications departments, which indicated that the discourse was present in the organisation. Ultimately, we chose CPG because they found our topic interesting and was willing to grant us the best access to data out of the companies we spoke to.

2.4.4 The Participants

To gather our data, we interviewed a variety of organisational members of CCLD, preferably both managers and employees, and people from both disciplines. In choosing our participants, the primary aim was to talk to members of CCLD who are all affected by the HRCOM discourse verbalised by the Director. This follows from our wish to not only look at how the Director constructs and diffuses this discourse but more importantly to learn how employees experience it and acts towards it. Moreover, when interviewing employees we also give them a voice on the matter - something which is crucial to CDA.

We discussed our wishes with the Director of the department, who in collaboration with two colleagues from the Communications team arranged a total of nine interviews for us. The interviewees are: the Director of CCLD, the Team Leader of Communications, the HR Manager, two HR consultants, and two Directors of other departments that work closely with CCLD. The nine respondents are of different ages and different sexes. The final participant is a former HR Partner

(currently organisational consultant and PA in the IT department), whom we chose to include believing that people who no longer work in the department may feel less obligations towards it and therefore feel more free in terms of what they can and will say (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). One possible drawback of this is that the former HR Partner's experiences might be somewhat outdated; however, since the former HR Partner has regular contact with the department, we feel that she is still in touch with the current affairs. A final point we wanted to note here is that two of the interviewees, namely the external directors, were no longer relevant to use for the purpose of our thesis, and as such they are not included in our analysis.

2.4.3 Interviews

Our interviews with managers and employees at CPG were conducted in a qualitative, semi-structured manner. As we are dealing with a unique case study, and wish to get insight into the ways in which the HRCOM discourse affects and shapes the everyday lives of our participants, the method of interviewing can be seen as a way of getting valuable information and viewpoints – as Alvesson & Deetz notes “it is difficult [...] to appreciate the meanings, ideas and understandings of a group of people if one has not talked with them” (2000, p. 194). Furthermore, since our research question is explorative in nature and not guided by hypotheses or theoretical frameworks, the semi-structured interview is particularly relevant in that the researcher seeks “to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). A semi-structured interview is “neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27), and this allows for steering the interview in a certain direction while still maintaining an openness towards other possible turns the interview could take. It is important to note here that our methodological framework makes us aware that our interviewees cannot be viewed as truth-tellers but should rather be viewed as politically conscious actors who may seek to promote their own agendas. This means that we also need to critically reflect on the responses that we get from our interviewees.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), it is advisable to employ an interview guide when conducting a semi-structured interview. We created one interview guide containing questions for all the employees of CCLD, though some questions are particularly aimed at the Director (see Appendix 1). Our interview guides were built around themes such as the considerations behind merging the HR

and Communications departments and the perceptions of this idea and the subsequent collaboration between the two functions. In each theme we included suggestive questions that were meant to provide inspiration in the interview situation. All interviews started off with asking the employee when (s)he started working in the company, and inquiring about their individual background and motivation for working in CPG. The replies to these questions shaped the interviewee's story, which then guided the remainder of the interview, with us subtly steering the direction of the conversation to make sure the most important topics were covered. During the interview, we aimed to actively listen to our interviewees and ask follow-up questions according to the statements made.

All interviews were held at CPG's headquarters in the employees' familiar surroundings. The nine interviews lasted approximately one hour each, took place over the course of three days, and they were all conducted in Danish. At the beginning of each interview, we briefly introduced ourselves, the purpose of the interviews, and we asked each interviewee for permission to record the interview as well as informed about the way that the interview would be used (see more about this in the section on ethics). Moreover, each interviewee had the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions before, during and after the interview. We took turns at interviewing, so while one was doing that, the other took notes and prepared for any additional questions. We made sure that the person taking notes was placed at a distance from the interviewee in order to ensure a more dialogue-based setting. At the end of each interview, we kindly asked our interviewees not to talk to their colleagues about the interview before we had conducted all of them. This was to ensure that the other respondents were not able to think about their answers beforehand, as we wanted spontaneous thoughts and feelings from our subjects.

Each interview was subsequently transcribed for two reasons. Firstly, transcribing the interviews allow us to have an accurate idea of the exact wording of the participants. Secondly, transcribing the interviews increases the accessibility of the data, thus making the analysis of the data less complicated. All of the interviews were transcribed word-for-word, excluding fillers like "ehm" and frequent repetitions that do not contribute to the overall meaning. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), these are not necessary to include when the purpose of the analysis is to focus on meaning. As the interviews were conducted in Danish, the quotations we use in the analysis are translated according to the intended meaning of the words.

2.4.5 Observations

When we acknowledge that the social world is constructed through intersubjective opinions and interpretations, and our task as researchers consists of understanding and explaining these, then inevitably our methodical approach must involve elements of participation and involvement in the object of study (Kristiansen & Krogstrup, 2002). This is necessary in order for us to gain access to the way organisational members make sense of various social situations related to the HRCOM discourse. Furthermore, studying discourses requires attention to both language and action as discourse can be seen as language in action (Blommaert, 2005). As such, we conducted two one-hour observations where members of the HR Change Support team and the Communications team were discussing ongoing and upcoming projects. The meetings were about CPG's annual engagement survey and performance conversations.

At the beginning of each meeting, we introduced ourselves briefly, following the same procedure as we did when interviewing the organisational members (see the previous section). When we participated in the meetings, we were silently observing the meeting while taking notes. At the end of each observation, we had the opportunity to ask a few clarifying questions. As such, the organisational members were aware of our role as researchers, and most of them already knew us from the previously conducted interviews. According to Kristiansen and Krogstrup (2002), the researcher can be classified as *participant as observer* when participating in the field in this way. In this participant role, our role as researchers were clear and visible, and the relationship between us and our participants was characterized by a mutual interest in the field (Ibid.).

The learning potential in short observations is to some extent limited compared to conducting longer, open explorative studies in that they are usually focused and selective (Warming, 2007). However, we argue that the knowledge gathered in these observations is still useful since we are able to use it in combination with the knowledge gathered in our interviews, as well as the material provided to us by the Director of CCLD.

2.4.6 Other Empirical Material

During the one month we visited CPG, we took field notes on the things we had observed. These notes include observations from walking around the department and from lunch in the canteen with CCLD

employees. The observations were documented both in written and recorded form and are taken into consideration in the analysis.

Furthermore, the Director of CCLD has provided us with department-specific material on the merger between HR and Communications, as well as the previous and current strategy for the department. This material will be included in the first part of our analysis in order to illustrate how top management constructs and diffuses the HRCOM discourse.

2.4.7 Reflections on Ethics

When a researcher chooses to work with qualitative methods, (s)he in principle invades on another person's privacy sphere through the questions and observations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Hence, ethical practice is of key importance, and we have taken this into consideration when designing and conducting interviews, observations, and in general other situations where we have been in contact with our respondents. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state it is the integrity of the researcher that eventually is the decisive factor. With this in mind, we asked the Director of CCLD whether they would like us to make our thesis confidential, which they did not deem necessary. However, we have chosen to anonymise the name of the company and our participants in order to protect the identities of individual members of the department. Moreover, we asked all of our interviewees whether they consented to be recorded. In every interview, we stated the purpose of our research and gave room for any questions to try to make our respondents feel safe and secure in the situation.

2.4.8 Validity of Qualitative Methods

When it comes to the validity of qualitative research, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that the craftsmanship and trustworthiness of the researcher become of key importance. Furthermore, the focus is not on validation of the end product, but on validation of the *process*. Thus, validity in qualitative research permeates the entire research process and can be referred to as craftsman-like quality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In order to enhance the quality of our interviews, we practiced interview techniques and gave feedback to each other beforehand. As mentioned previously, we have also strived to be open in our approach, and continuously challenge our own assumptions and biases, as well as always bearing in mind any ethical issues. Furthermore, we sought to verify our interpretation of our respondents' answers over the course of the interviews which in some cases lead to a different

understanding than the initial one. Overall, our craftsmanship in regards to interviewing improved during the interview process, for example our ability to sense what was important and to ask follow-up questions. This means that we might have missed out on some interesting information in the first interviews. However, we do not believe that this diminishes the value of the knowledge acquired from the interviews.

Additionally, we can look at two other criteria for validity in qualitative research; transparency and heuristics (Dahler-Larsen, 2008). Transparency entails that the researcher lay bare his or hers methodological procedures so that others can see exactly what has taken place during the research. We have tried to accomplish this by being as detailed as possible in the descriptions of our process. The heuristics criteria purports that the research should result in new knowledge, insights and perspectives, which we have previously argued for in our introduction. Based on the above criteria, we argue that our research process can be considered valid.

2.5 Methodological Limitations

In hindsight, there are a few limitations that we wish to highlight in relation to our methodology and chosen methods. First, we are aware that we have not talked to any members of the external communications team. We believe that this is due to the Director's wish to emphasise where the collaboration between HR and communication is most visible. As such, we cannot know whether we would have obtained different answers from the organisational members in that team which could have presented us with a different view of the HRCOM discourse and its implications.

Second, we would have liked to have had more time between the interviews and observations in CPG. The fact that all empirical material was collected over a period of one week made it hard for us to reflect on the inputs we were getting. Consequently, we did not get to adjust our interview guides as we went along in the process, which meant that we every now and then spent too much time focusing on questions that in hindsight might not be so relevant.

The final limitation relates to CDA and the focus on context. While we have attempted to explore the nature of the context in which the HRCOM discourse is embedded by participating in observations and talking to organisational members, we acknowledge that our view of it is to some extent limited. Firstly, we would have liked to spend more time in CPG to get a more thorough understanding of how

the discourse is reflected in organisational reality. This means that our view of how the employees act towards each other on a day-to-day basis is somewhat limited. Secondly, CDA focuses on exploring discourses that have existed prior to the discourse in question; however, since many of our interviewees had difficulties recalling historical episodes in greater detail, the scope of our study has not enabled us to explore this in depth.

2.6 Analytical Strategy

In this section we account for our choice of analytical strategy, that is, how we attempt to sort and reduce our empirical material. This is important because we cannot analyse our empirical data properly without considering what to look for.

When we sort our empirical material, it is inevitable not to let our research question and methodological perspective guide the process, which in turn both limit and enable the analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). However, it is important to let the empirical material guide our understanding of the studied phenomenon, otherwise the point of using this kind of material goes to waste (Ibid.). As such, we are informed by our research question and CDA when sorting through our empirical material, while at the same time we aim to keep an open mind so that we do not become blind to other clues as a consequence. As Rennstam & Wästerfors (2011) note, it is about finding the right balance; an educated researcher is preferable to a specialist who notices nothing besides what he or she has already seen.

Specifically, we look for quotes and expressions that seem somehow important for our understanding of how the HRCOM discourse is constructed and diffused. Additionally, we look for examples of expressions where the discourse appears to be reproduced, as well as look for expressions that may challenge it. This helps us determine how the discourse is perceived and acted upon among organisational members. Following this, these four overarching themes – construction, diffusion, reproduction, and challenge – are broken down into smaller themes that reflect how we understand what the organisational members of CPG are telling us. As such, the subsequent headings in our analysis do not necessarily reflect something the organisational members express directly, but should rather be viewed as important themes that we identify from their quotes.

As qualitative studies should focus on variation and different meanings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011), we look for statements that express different things since this provides us with a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, we look for expressions or quotes that provide us with an insight into

different aspects of the organisational structure and culture that can have an impact on the construction, diffusion, and perception of the HRCOM discourse. We look for this as CDA emphasises the dialectical nature between discourse and structure as well as the importance of context. The nature of CDA also alerts us to look for statements and expressions that reflect relations of power because CDA argues that language and power are inextricably woven. More specifically, this means that we look for quotes that tell us something about whose agenda that takes precedence and who gets to set the tone, as well as quotes that express examples of more or less conscious power use and suppression. Furthermore, having CDA in mind makes us pay attention to elements of ideology and hegemony by looking for quotes that express perceived “truths”, that is, something which is taken for granted, or is considered natural, which also means that it gets perceived as unchangeable.

When we reduce our empirical material, it can best be understood through the metaphor of making a movie; there are no rules for picking scenes, episodes, or quotes – the task of the editor is to pick examples that best illustrate the phenomenon that needs to be highlighted (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2011). However, choosing examples is not about finding those that support the general picture, rather the general picture should be developed by the examples (Ibid.). Therefore, reducing our empirical material should first and foremost be about selecting the themes developed in the sorting process that best highlight the construction, diffusion, and perceptions of the HRCOM discourse. Thus, choosing quotes becomes a matter of representing as many points of view as possible for two reasons. First of all, this is to ensure that we provide a selective but fair representation of the material. Secondly, we aim to select a broad variety of quotes since CDA stresses the importance of giving people a voice.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

Part One – The Construction and Diffusion of the HRCOM Discourse

In the first part of the analysis, we explore how the HRCOM discourse is constructed and diffused. Initially, we briefly describe the circumstances in which the merger between HR and Communications took place in CPG. The next step is then to look at how the HRCOM discourse is constructed, that is, which truths it puts forward, and to explore how the discourse is diffused. Subsequently, we analyse how the discourse has come into being, bringing in relevant aspects of context and power relations. Finally, we wrap up the first part of the analysis with a sub-conclusion.

3.1 Setting the Scene

In order to thoroughly understand the HRCOM discourse and how it is constructed in CPG, it is necessary to begin by looking at some key circumstances around the merger of HR and Communications. As such, we believe it is important provide a general overview in order to set the frame for the subsequent analysis.

The merging of HR and Communications in CPG occurred in the summer of 2008 as an initiative of the former Director of Marketing and Communications (now the Director of CCLD) who has a background in communication. For the sake of convenience, we choose to call him John for the remainder of the thesis. He explains how the idea occurred to him because he felt the need to divide Marketing and Communications and instead combine Marketing with Sales. Thus, he needed to, in his own words, “come up with something else” for his Communications department and started to take a look at the organisation. Accidentally, CPG had just let their HR Director go. This made him think: “how can you make HR and Communications come together? Maybe it *did* make sense. And I quickly figured out that I thought I could really make it work. I thought they could benefit from each other.” Hence, John believes the idea of merging the two functions was primarily his, and it came into being by what he describes as “partly a coincidence”, seeing as they did not have an HR Director at the time.

Another important circumstance to highlight is that the merger took effect in 2008, the same year as the Financial Crisis erupted. Judging from the following remark from John, this was probably not a coincidence: “a financial crisis is an obvious occasion for an organisational sense-check.” Many companies began to consider how they could deliver with fewer resources and CPG was no exception. Thus, John is straightforward about the fact that the economic aspect was also part of the decision to

merge the two functions, noting that “there is a rational reason to do it ... you can save money.” Hence, the eruption of the Financial Crisis is an important aspect of how the idea came about. The organisational sense-check explains the need for finding ways to make the organisation more effective with fewer resources, and the lack of an HR Director partly explains why it was merging HR and Communications that came up as the solution. With that said, John found that it made a lot of sense to combine the two, for several other reasons, which we highlight as we analyse how the HRCOM discourse is constructed in CPG.

As a final point, John would only have to get the merger approved by the CEO, who was the only member of senior management at the time. The decision to go through with the idea was made within two months. Thus, the decision was made rapidly by John and the CEO, with John being the driving force of the initiative and thus the primary advocate of the discourse that we argue follows from it. This is why we in the remainder of the analysis refer to the HRCOM discourse, as it unfolds in CPG, as being constructed by John, though we are aware that discourses are not constructed in a vacuum, but are rather products of, as well as the producers of, social practice. Many other factors play a role in the construction of the discourse besides John, which we seek to explicate throughout the analysis.

3.2 Construction of the HRCOM Discourse

In the following, we analyse the way in which John attempts to construct and diffuse the HRCOM discourse. For the sake of clarity, the construction of the discourse is broken into smaller parts reflecting truths put forward by the discourse. However, they all interrelate and should be considered as such.

3.2.1 The combination of strengths create synergies

The decision to merge HR and Communications was an obvious choice for John as he sees the two as closely related due to the grey areas that exist between them. The following quote illustrates how John thinks that HR and Communications in combination support the business:

They're both support functions that struggle to become strategically anchored and drivers of organisational development, rather than just performing specific tasks. And a lot of HR tasks have a large element of communication, or you can actually put it differently; it's probably not as much about

HR and Communications... it's about the leader's role in CPG. When a leader has to complete a task, he or she has to draw on some HR knowledge and competencies that we can provide but also communication. So it's with the individual leader it all comes together.

More than just being able to support each other, John argues that combining the departments is about being able to develop and support the leaders in CPG, which he argues is “where he sees the synergy”. As such, the two functions should collaborate broadly on developing leaders and making them better at what they do. What is interesting to note here is that John emphasises how this constellation is more about the role of the leader than it is about HR and Communications per se. This implies that the departments have not been merged so that they individually can become better at way they do, but rather that they together can benefit from each other's capabilities in their efforts to develop the leaders of the organisation.

The combined HR and Communications department also has to focus on creating a positive corporate reputation and anchoring CPG's strategy. According to John, creating a positive reputation for CPG is important: “Everything we do in HR and Communications is about CPG's reputation [...] It requires us to do everything correctly, to be competent and to be able to collaborate. We have to make a difference. That's what makes CPG perform.” In this quote, John states that the department is expected to contribute to a strong reputation. Secondly, the department has to make sure that CPG's strategy becomes anchored in the organisation because “the strategy's actually our true customer, and we need to facilitate the changes needed so that we can realise that strategy”, as John notes. While we just pointed to how John believes it is basically about the leaders, it is just as much about serving the company's strategy. He believes that for the strategy to be anchored in the organisation, they need to make the changes it acquires, which is something the combined department is supposed to deliver. John is a firm believer that this is possible, stating that “in all modesty, we're really good at this.” Thus, collaboration between HR and Communications professionals should make the organisation better at developing leaders, strengthening the company's reputation, and facilitating change to support the overall strategy. John also believes that there is a lot to gain economically:

Combining the two and taking a “competencies centre-approach” - that is, putting all employees into a pool from where you can order tasks - made us able to solve the same tasks with fewer people. We went from 38 people to 26 or 27 today... that's more than a quarter less and that counts. Besides this,

we've reduced our activity budget. So there are sizeable cost efficiency advantages to be gained from this.

This illustrates how there seems to be a discourse of efficiency behind this decision in that they can do the same things with fewer people. At the same time John believes that by combining all these skills in one pool, it becomes easier for the organisation to draw on the department's expertise. Even though this might sound like the more persuading argument for combining the two, John believes that the economic gain is an added benefit. The real motive to combine the functions, he claims, is the aforementioned aspects. Another added benefit which he points to is that the merger, in his own words, "would be for the benefit of CPG as well as for me because it meant that I would get more responsibility." Thus, John explains that not only CPG has benefitted from the merger, he also gained personally from it. Nonetheless, he still claims that the true value in merging the department is more than this; it is about improving the organisation and making it the best it can be, and he believes that combining the strengths of these disciplines can do just that. Further in line with this, he argues that "the first one builds motivation and the other anchors the initiatives strategically." "The first" here refers to communication, and by "the other" he means HR. Thus, he believes that the two functions have different strengths that benefit each other and with that "you can create more sustainable value that you could before." He continues by explaining how the functions have been used to working more deadline-based, from one task to the next:

Maybe you made a campaign or you made a change, but the problem was that nobody took ownership of it. So the campaign might have been great but at the end of the day who cares? Because the next day you just made another campaign.

Here, John suggests that previously the functions have lacked the ability to anchor their initiatives in the organisation, and as a consequence, he believes the initiatives had little effect on the organisation. This is something the combining forces of HR and Communications should be able to solve. John believes that the two functions can create lasting value by anchoring initiatives and taking ownership of them, which ultimately should result in synergies that would not be possible otherwise.

3.2.2 Collaboration increases performance

When it was time to merge the departments, John had no overall plan for the change process. He instead focused on the tasks at hand and how the new department could collaborate on them: “I created an entirely new agenda with the tasks we needed to solve and how to solve them. And then the idea was to work our way through it.” It seems John has a very clear idea about how this should progress. In other words, John believes that HR and Communications should find their common ground through the tasks he presents them with. This appears to be primarily due to his belief that team building exercises do not move people:

I am very sceptical of such initiatives [...] If you do something, then you need to root it professionally. It's the everyday activities that matter; it's the understanding of the tasks we work on that's important. You need to get to know each other in a new team, but this is best done by working through it.

As such, he believes that the two functions should get acquainted with each other during day-to-day tasks rather than through a number of forced social activities. It seems that for him it is important to root initiatives in professionalism rather than through purely social activities. Focusing on tasks rather than teambuilding exercises meant that during the first year of the merger, the department went through a “storming phase” where the focus was on exploring what the other function was all about:

We had a phase, as you have when you combine things like this, where you have to figure out which norms are applicable and how we do things well, as well as what we should stop doing, things that obstruct the development we're trying to achieve.

What is interesting in this quote is that John seems to have an idea about what is acceptable and not acceptable in terms of behaviour, or put differently, he believes that there are right and wrong ways to act. The “wrong” behaviour he defines as doing things that “obstruct” the desired development. This quote simultaneously points to relations of power; he states that *you* have to figure out which norms are applicable, on the surface suggesting that it is a collective task to figure these issues out. Yet, what he really implies is that *he* had to figure out how to detect “obstructive” behaviour. Removing obstructions and encouraging the right behaviour is an effort to turn CPG into what they call a “performance organisation”, which is defined as creating “effective leadership and conduct that support the execution of strategic goals, value creation and commercial results” (see Appendix 2).

John's thought on this is that the performance agenda is another example of a task where everything comes together for HR and Communications. The department has been working on a service called "performance conversations", a service which John is particularly proud of:

It's our people who coach, we've made everything from A to Z ourselves, it's anchored in CPG's strategy [...]. And there's a lot of communication activities in it; getting it rooted in the organisation, writing about it, getting people on board, creating the sessions, and keeping it alive. It's the kind of task where everything comes together and all of HR and parts of Communications are involved in the process, myself included.

Here, John presents a combined HR and Communications task that he believes has added a lot of value to the organisation because they have anchored it in CPG's strategy and rooted it in the organisation. In addition, this quote paints a picture of what John perceives as the perfect example of what you can achieve by combining these functions. Not only does John believe that the department has contributed to increased performance, he also finds that the joining of forces has enabled the functions to create sustainable value:

We've actually just kept improving our execution of projects, and we can tell from our satisfaction ratings that we perform better today than we did in the beginning. In fact, from the onset we performed better than the former HR department if we measure it in terms of customer satisfaction - the leaders, that is.

There seems to be little doubt in John's mind that the decision to combine HR and Communications was a great one, and since they seem to keep improving their own and the organisation's performance, we argue it only serves to reinforce this perception. Moreover, John thinks that the department's ability to support and deliver a finished product to the leaders in CPG and the subsequently positive satisfaction ratings, based on answers from managers, both highlight the naturalness of the HR and Communications constellation: "the leaders get more than they did before because you get HR and communication integrated in the finished product... I think that's part of the reason they are so satisfied." Overall, John seems to believe that through collaborating on various tasks the functions have found the common ground needed for the department to continue contributing to increased organisational performance.

3.2.3 Physical proximity is a necessity

In general, John wants all planning and execution of tasks to take place across the two functions, and for that to happen John found it was necessary to physically merge them. In relation to this he states that “it would be much more difficult [to collaborate if we were split up], that’s obvious.” It is illustrated here how John takes for granted that physical proximity is necessary if the collaboration is to be successful. He believes that by being physically close, employees are more aware of the state of affairs in the department:

First of all, you have the possibility of asking your colleague about something that you know she’s really good at. [...] Secondly, and that’s great, you know what the others are working on, so you have some knowledge about what is happening in CPG. Overall, in the department they actually have a good amount of knowledge sharing. [...] They also convene for joint meetings.

John believes that physical proximity is important in order to share knowledge, which he finds to be necessary if the functions are to benefit from collaboration on various tasks. In this quote, he also points out that his employees are a textbook example of this as they are effectively exchanging expertise. Hence, even though the members of the two disciplines are kept somewhat separate within the open office space, cf. Figure 1 on page 11), he finds that such comprehensive collaboration and the subsequent knowledge sharing would be nearly impossible if it was not for the physical re-organisation of the functions.

Overall, it appears that to John it is beyond doubt that merging HR and Communications and locating them together physically has been the right decision for CPG: “It has been a huge advantage. That is indisputable. Today, when we look at it on all parameters, you can’t deny that this has been a success.” What is interesting is that John stresses that it is impossible to deny that his idea of merging the two functions has been a great success. John’s claim that the structural alteration has been a success on all parameters can be analysed and interpreted as an attempt to construct a bulletproof argument that renders it difficult for others to challenge the appropriateness of the constellation. On a more personal level, he thinks that it would be completely wrong to split the functions again: “I invented it, and I know it makes a difference so if at one point in the future someone, out of the blue, wants to separate them... I probably wouldn’t be here.” In describing himself as the “inventor”, John stresses his own role in the process, which simultaneously indicates that he is very personally invested in and convinced

about the usefulness of this constellation. This, we argue, helps to explain why he advocates so strongly for combining HR and Communications.

3.2.4 A tailored solution

Since we are aware that many other companies have combined their HR and Communications department, we find it relevant to explore if this has any impact on how the HRCOM discourse is constructed in CPG. When asked if he had heard about other organisations that had done something similar as CPG, John answers: “well, no... I saw afterwards that... uhm... someone else had done it, but it was not a driving force... I mean, the idea came very much from the inside-out.” This indicates that John does not believe he has been influenced by the trend that was going on in the market at the time where a number of HR-Communications mergers took place. What is more, John explicitly emphasises that in CPG they perceive company as markedly different from the standard:

We have a history of being a bit different than the rest. So in CPG, we believe we’re something special. Not because we’re particularly great or anything, but still... We have a different business model than what they typically have in the market.

The company’s self-perception in that sense fits the observation that John does not want CPG to be associated to the general trend. It appears that the notion of a “trend” is thought of as the opposite of “special”. John’s perception of “trend” and “uniqueness” as binary opposites indicates that for one, he wants to give the impression that the idea of merging HR and Communications was not merely “jumping the bandwagon”, but has arisen out of an organisational need. In other words, it is a tailored solution to CPG which might also be why he states that “I don’t tell other companies to just go ahead and merge them. [...] It is very dependent on how the organisation generally works.” Secondly, it gives the impression that he prefers to be perceived as original, which is also underlined when he labels himself as the “inventor” of this idea. Arguably, by emphasising the aspect of personal invention, and thus distancing himself from other practices, he attempts to construct the HRCOM discourse as something unique to CPG and even unique to him as a person. In other words, John perceives the idea of merging HR and Communications as fundamentally his own, which is probably why it seems important for him to construct the HRCOM discourse in a predominantly positive manner. Likewise, it appears important for him to highlight the positive aspects in a way that points to the benefits of

maintaining this constellation, since we argue it helps him to secure his current position as being responsible for two areas.

Though John believes he has not been influenced by anyone else in his decision to combine these two functions, we find it peculiar that his construction of the HRCOM discourse resembles the way others construct it as well. In our introduction, we illustrated how the HRCOM discourse is constructed by communication professionals and consultants in general. We find that, like them, John focuses on the importance of being able to handle changes and develop leaders, and that HR and Communications are supposed to be able to solve these tasks in unison. He also emphasises how synergies come from collaborating on various tasks because they are able to complement each other's weaknesses. Although he claims not to be influenced at all by the debate around this constellation, we find it unlikely that his idea to combine the departments should have arisen independently from his debate, seeing as they are so alike. In other words, we believe that John in one way or another has been inspired by what is going on in the market and that this has played a significant role in how he constructs the HRCOM discourse in CPG.

3.2.5 The unintentional normativity of the discourse

In the analysis described in the previous sections, it appears that the HRCOM discourse as it is constructed in CPG puts forward ideals of John's desired state of affairs. We find this interesting because it reflects how the HRCOM discourse is inherently normative due to the way he constructs it. A similar observation can be made from some of the written material we received from John. Here, he employs the word *must* several times when talking about the purpose of the department (see Appendix 3). Arguably, when John talks about the merger and his thoughts behind it, he - more or less consciously - creates certain ideals, norms, and rules for how his employees should behave. The HRCOM discourse is constructed in a predominantly positive way; he stresses that merging the two functions has been very successful, that both the disciplines have improved from it, and that it is an important part of the company's financial well-being. As such, he talks about the department as a practice that is almost indispensable to CPG. Moreover, the way the HRCOM discourse is constructed in CPG suggests that HR and Communications should collaborate broadly, on a day-to-day basis, on a wide variety of tasks concerning leadership development, change management, reputation management, and performance improvement, just to mention some of the areas that John stresses most.

The employees are urged to practice and value teamwork, as well as to consider the task at hand as the most important focus point. This also implies that there is a high probability of being frowned upon when an employee chooses to work independently rather than consulting his or her colleagues.

Furthermore, in the way the HRCOM discourse is constructed it encourages a strong focus on strategy and performance, and expects CCLD to be drivers of development. This means that more is expected from the employees of the department in terms of being able to deliver measurable results. In addition, John stresses that the merger has a purpose of achieving more efficiency. This means that the discourse contains an expectation that you can do more with less, entailing that fewer people are capable of taking on more responsibility if they collaborate.

This construction of the HRCOM discourse also creates an expectation that the strengths of HR and Communications benefit each other. HR's strength of being process-oriented and capable of anchoring initiatives is thus supposed to benefit Communications, and Communications' strength of being quick at executing and capable of motivating people is supposed to be beneficial for HR. Along with this, the importance of physical closeness is emphasised, and considered a necessity for great collaboration. Finally, the discourse implies that this constellation is natural, or at least has become natural. In line with this, John states that

[...] some of the sceptics are not here anymore so.... well, again it is about the group so if you're responsible for a group and you feel that it has now been running for some time and there's a person who is not really on board, then it's my responsibility to fix it.

Arguably, the HRCOM discourse encourages a certain kind of behaviour that people are somewhat expected to follow, and if they do not do so, it needs to be fixed. John quite frankly states that if people cannot see themselves in this constellation they may need help to figure out what is best for them, even if that means seeking alternative ways. It seems advisable, then, to adhere to the suggested norms if you would like to maintain your position in the company, leading to the suspicion that there is also an element of conformity embedded in the discourse. In sum, it appears argue that by setting up such norms, John constructs an ideal discourse that reflects how he perceives the perfect HR and Communications constellation. Thus, we choose to refer to the HRCOM discourse as the *ideal discourse* when we analyse and discuss how it unfolds in CPG. As a reminder, this means that whenever we say "the HRCOM discourse" we refer to the broader societal discourse.

3.3 Diffusion of the Ideal Discourse

Having established how the HRCOM discourse is constructed in CPG as an ideal discourse, we now turn our attention to how it is diffused in the organisation. Seeing as John is quite personally invested in his idea of merging HR and Communications, it follows that he has a great interest in gaining widespread support for the idea. Yet, interestingly, when asked about what he did to gain support from the members of the two functions, John seemed to signal that he took the implementation of the merger with ease, saying, “we didn’t do much when we merged the functions, we just did it, come on, right?” Thus, John describes the diffusion of the ideal discourse not as happening through a carefully considered approach, but as driven by a deeply held belief that ‘learning by doing’ is a sufficient approach. John’s arguing that it is in the day-to-day tasks the synergies arise, and not by the means of teambuilding efforts, somehow carries the implication that he is confident the discourse will spread itself. Still, he also notes that

We [John and the team leaders] have tried to create as much we-feeling as possible. And keep preaching the importance of the group, right? That we only succeed when we succeed as a group. We don’t succeed when an individual does well; we succeed when the entire group succeeds. Preach that again and again, that’s one of my basic principles. So we need skilled people, and some are indeed better than others, but it’s important to praise the team.

In this statement John suggests that the group is more important than the individual when it comes to succeeding, which is why he attempts to get employees to commit to the group. John’s use of the word “preach” is interesting in this context for more than one reason. First of all, it implies that, after all, he does attempt to actively diffuse the ideal discourse by emphasising the importance of collaboration and a feeling of belonging together, in spite of the different professional capabilities of the group. Second of all, it is interesting because of the connotations this word gives. Preaching has the connotation of being educative, persistent, and moralising. As such, it paints a picture of John taking on the role of the priest who preaches to his congregation over and over about the proper ways of living your life, leaving little room for interpretation or individual preferences. This can be understood as a form of one-way communication because he does not involve his employees in determining the “morals” that are supposed to guide their actions. His hope seems to be that if he preaches it enough, the message will somehow sediment in the minds of his employees.

Furthermore, John has expressed the ideal discourse externally more than once over a number of years, both in articles on online communities and in newspapers, which can be viewed as a more indirect way of diffusing the ideal discourse. When John communicates the ideal discourse externally, it is – presumably – not only intended for an external audience, it can also be understood as a way of reinforcing the ideal discourse not only for him but also for the entire organisation. In other words, it is John’s way of trying to enhance the power of the discourse. Thus, he lines up a number of expectations that the department has to live up to. Since these expectations are not only expressed internally, but are also expressed “to the world”, it arguably makes them somewhat more difficult to escape since everyone is informed about the ideals and hence the expected behaviour. The statements made in those online and printed articles are more or less consistent with what he expressed during his interview. In the articles, John also emphasises the importance of developing the organisation and its leaders. He highlights the strategy as the primary customer, and he stresses the efficiency gained from it. In one article (see appendix 4) he states,

It has taken me by surprise the degree to which people from both HR and Communications seek confirmation of the importance of their area of expertise. This is evident for example when we had satisfaction surveys where the employees have said “we need to put HR on the agenda” and “we need to put communication on the agenda”. No. We need to put CPG’s strategy on the agenda! The disciplines are not the pivotal point. We have been stuck in our silos.

With this statement, he stresses that what should be considered the most important focus area is the strategy. As a consequence, attention to and the importance of the individual areas of expertise come in second. This is not to say that John does not perceive professional expertise as important. On the contrary, he stresses that their different strengths are what makes the collaboration great, but as the strategy is so important to him, the individual areas of expertise become less important. This is in line with what we have illustrated so far; the task is what is important, and in order to successfully complete the task, the disciplines need to collaborate and cherish the group. In other words, the so-called “silo-thinking” has to end. In this way, he appears quite consistent in the way he attempts to both construct and diffuse the ideal discourse.

3.4 Reflections on Context and Power

In what follows, we will explore how context and relations of power affect the construction of the ideal discourse. This contributes to a more thorough understanding of how the discourse is constructed and diffused.

3.4.1 *Interplay with other discourses*

As previously mentioned, discourses are always constructed in interplay with other discourses and the ideal discourse is no exception. We can identify at least three key discourses in the organisation that have shaped, and are still shaping, the ideal discourse, namely *change management*, *leadership development* and *performance*.

There appears to be a general understanding in CPG about the necessity of change. John stresses this by stating that “there’s a lot of focus on improving... focus on change and doing the best thing possible.” With this statement, he indirectly suggests that in order to improve, the organisation needs to change. Simultaneously, he notes that “I’m very motivated by change and that things can be done differently than we do now. What we do is not necessarily bad, but if we can do it a little differently, then that’s great.” While John believes business is currently booming, he finds that there is always room for improvement, thereby also implying that changes are inevitable. This also implies that he regards change as a goal in itself, as long as it is for the better. Yet, John is not the only one who believes change is important; other employees in CCLD point to this as well. For one, the Communications Team Leader states that “one thing that’s certain is that changes are here to stay. Everything changes, that’s the only thing that’s certain, right? And that’s also the focus of our communication, definitely.” She here describes how the intensive focus on change impacts her work activities. One Communications Consultant comments on how she finds change to be a condition of today’s environment:

I think it’s a condition... life’s never at a standstill, really, so a company needs to keep track and change things that need changing. Even though this can cause disturbances and uncertainty, all sorts of things, and even though it’s always hard to change people’s habits, it’s necessary... That’s just the way it is.

What is interesting about the way this employee expresses her perception of change is that although she thinks it may cause disturbances and uncertainty, she still finds it necessary. Together, these employees express how they find that “everything changes” and that “that’s just the way it is.” It seems the importance of change is taken for granted, and because of this we argue that the discourse of change seems quite pervasive in the organisation. In other words, both John and the employees consent to the idea that changing the organisation is an inevitable task that they ought to continuously deal with.

The discourse of change interplays with the ideal discourse in at least two ways in terms of shaping and justifying it. Firstly, the context of the Financial Crisis and the subsequent perception that change is necessary may have made the senior management of CPG reflect on how to tackle changes, and John could use this angle to promote the HR and Communications constellation. Secondly, seeing as John argues that they have indeed become apt at handling changes, and this argument becomes a way of justifying the continued combination of the two functions. Additionally, the ideal discourses reproduces the discourse of change management simply by stressing that being able to handle change is necessary, something which we earlier noted that John believes the department does well.

Moreover, we wish to draw attention to leadership development, which we argue is also an important discourse in CPG. Not only John, but also a number of employees point to how leadership development is an important theme in CPG. The HR Manager notes that the members of CCLD are there to “help the leaders carry out their managerial duty.” Thus, he underlines how one of the main ideas behind this department is to better develop leaders. In line with this, an HR Consultant comments on how the department works on “increasing CPG’s performance by developing our leaders. At the moment we are working on a strength-based approach to leadership [...]. All leaders go through the strength-based approach to leadership.” This employee explains how she pays a lot of attention to educating leaders through a strength-based approach to leadership, and she illustrates how this initiative is a pervasive organisational initiative, seeing as all leaders must go through this training. Several of the employees believe that this initiative is helpful and that the leaders are responding well to it, which one Communications Consultant notes: “This strength-based leadership approach [...] I believe it has potential to be great for CPG and all of us.” She appears to put a lot of faith in the strength-based leadership approach, and more broadly in the importance of leadership development. These examples show that there is a general understanding of the importance of having well-trained

leaders as this is seen as a means to achieve increased organisational performance. Furthermore, the fact that the department is called Corporate Communications and Leadership Development serves to underline how the department builds on the perception that leadership development is of key importance.

We argue that while the discourse of leadership development may have been important before the departments were merged, particularly when considering how it appears to be of importance in the business environment, the ideal discourse has contributed to reinforcing its level of importance. In this way, the leadership development discourse and the ideal discourse are in a dialectical relationship with each other; each supports the existence of the other in the organisation.

Finally, the Financial Crisis has brought about a performance agenda, and as a result a performance discourse has arisen in CPG. John notes that although CPG has managed to weather the financial crisis, the competition remains ruthless. This prompts them to look inward, leading him to ask what their organisation looks like and how they can slim it down by combining functions. Combining HR and Communications, then, can be considered a product of CPG's ambition to increase performance and perform better than the rest. One of the HR Consultants also comments on this development:

There is a wish to make CPG become a performance organisation where focus is on delivery, competencies, engagement, development, all the time keeping up with and beating the competition... to be competitive - and that places high demands on all of CPG.

This employee feels increased pressure to perform, so that CPG remains one of the leading pension companies. We noted earlier how John argues that the company performs better today than ever before, and that he attributes some of that increased performance to the collaboration between HR and Communications. In that way, the ideal discourse feeds back into the performance discourse; the department's ability to develop leaders and handle changes is seen as directly impacting the organisation's performance. At the same time, the performance discourse can also help justify the department's continued existence, provided that CPG keeps performing and John is able to convince senior management that CCLD is actively involved the process of achieving this.

3.4.2 The ideal discourse in a struggle for power

In addition to having other discourses shape and justify its existence, we also find that the way the ideal discourse is constructed and diffused is influenced by relations of power. At one point during our interview, John calls attention to his relationship with senior management: “the contact I have with the senior management has made a lot of things much easier [...] for example when we had to merge the two departments [laughs].” This quote illustrates how John does not conceal that he has an advantageous relationship with senior management that makes it easier for him to push through his agenda and make decisions. This is underlined by him laughing as he states this. As mentioned previously, senior management only consisted of the CEO at the time, meaning that John did not have too many people to persuade. This may have been to his advantage, which is also reflected in the following quote from John:

I was reporting directly to the CEO, just like I do today, so I go to him and say “I’ve made this proposal, wouldn’t it be a good idea to do this?” And then I received an email from him saying “go ahead”.

It appears that the process of convincing the CEO to make the structural arrangements went fairly smoothly. If CPG’s senior management had consisted of more than just the CEO, which it did from 2009, then John notes that they would have had to discuss and settle on the idea. Though this may not have changed anything, John was in a privileged position, thus making it easier for him to advance his agenda.

If we acknowledge that John has been able to merge HR and Communications due to relations of power, it simultaneously opens up for the possibility that other attempts to set the direction for the organisation might have been stifled. We believe this might have been the case here considering how the department’s HR Manager explains how he had a different vision for HR:

Back then, my recommendation for our CEO was that we should find an experienced HR Director with a name that would ensure that the rest of the organisation respected him or her from day one. [...] So in order for HR not to be side-tracked, it was my recommendation that we hire a competent, well-known HR Director externally.

The HR Manager’s recommendation to the CEO, then, was finding an external professional with an HR background who would be able to demand respect from the start. Evidently, something completely

different happened. By the time that John was appointed the new head of the merged departments the HR Manager had been the interim head of the HR department for approximately eight months. During this time, he realised that this was not going to be a permanent position, and he believed that they would therefore find an external person to fill the position: “[...] if we were to find a person internally, I didn’t think that there would be anyone else who could handle the job [but me]”. Consequently, when the decision was made to merge HR with Communications, the HR Manager was taken aback because he could not, in his own words, “in my wildest fantasy imagine a scenario where you would take our Communications Director and throw HR under his area of responsibility.” Still, he notes it is very likely that HR would be reformed regardless due to the former HR Director’s fall out with senior management about HR’s level of importance in CPG. Yet, he also admits that “I would’ve liked to be more involved in the decision, that’s no secret.” It appears that he felt slightly cheated because he was not listened to, and nor was he offered the chance to take on the HR Director position permanently. The HR Manager also reflects on John’s share in this reform:

I don’t think one should be afraid to admit to the fact that John was working behind the scenes [...] obviously, he had a very small... probably the smallest of all the areas of responsibility... Communications was a very small area. And at the time he’d been here for six or seven years and of course he had ambition for more... So I think it played a role that... he probably had capacity for more and was well-liked... had the support of senior management [...] I definitely think that there was some lobbying going on.

From this we argue that it seems as though the HR Manager feels somewhat envious of how John managed to push through his agenda even though he had the smallest area of responsibility. This is probably because he himself felt overlooked in the decision-making process. His inability to persuade the CEO of the usefulness of his idea might simply be because John had a closer relationship to the CEO than did he. However, it has probably not been a conscious decision by John to ignore the HR Manager in the process, seeing as we have learned that they did not know each other very well at the time. While ignoring the HR Manager may not have been John’s intention, John was still the one who got to set the agenda for HR, and as a consequence, the HR Manager’s agenda was suppressed.

Besides from relations of power influencing the agenda-setting, timing also played a significant role in the constitution of the new department. Since change management, leadership development and performance were and still are important to many companies in the market, subsequently resulting in

many companies merging their HR and Communications departments, John is likely to have drawn on such examples to promote his agenda. This was possible because the idea of merging HR and Communications not only promised the possibilities of increasing performance, but also suggested a solution to the economic concerns of the CEO in that they could do with fewer people and spare a Director. In addition, CPG was facing a large-scale reorganisation, laying off 10 percent of its staff. Thus, John had timing on his side, seeing that both internal and external factors provided a welcome opportunity for him to advance his own agenda.

Taking all of these aspects into consideration, we argue that the ideal discourse has been in a struggle with other discourses in its attempt to take root in the organisation. This is evident by the HR Manager's attempt to put forward a discourse that would set a completely different direction for HR. This also suggests how social structures, such as John's relationship with the CEO along with contextual factors, enable the construction and diffusion of the ideal discourse.

3.5 Concluding Part One

Part one of the analysis reveals that the HRCOM discourse is constructed in CPG according to at least four truths. First of all, bringing the strengths of the two functions together are supposed to result in synergies. Secondly, the functions should find a common ground through collaborating on various tasks, which is expected to result in increased organisational performance. Third, the department is to be understood as a tailored solution, which addresses the needs of CPG, and not as a product of a trend in the market. Lastly, physical proximity is considered a necessity if the functions are to achieve the kind of knowledge sharing needed for the collaboration to be successful. Thus, it seems that the construction of the HRCOM discourse in CPG is inherently normative in that it puts forward ideals that employees may feel obliged to follow, making it an ideal discourse.

In terms of diffusion, we find that the ideal discourse is promoted by the Director John in external media as well as internally by preaching that the group is more important than the individual functions if the collaboration is to be successful. Yet, at the same time the Director seems to employ a "learning by doing" approach, which entails that he expects his employees will come to appreciate the idea of them working together through collaboration on day-to-day tasks.

Furthermore, part one has illustrated how other discourses, namely those of change management, leadership development and performance, both shape and justify the construction and existence of the ideal discourse. Likewise, the ideal discourse reproduces all of these discourses, and as such, it is in a continuous interplay with other simultaneously existing organisational discourses. As a final point, we find that relations of power and issues of timing have been important in the Director's attempt to push through his agenda. The Director's relationship with the CEO coupled with favourable internal and external conditions seems to have made it easier for him to advance his agenda of merging HR and Communications. As such this has rendered possible the construction and diffusion of the ideal discourse, meaning that other competing discourses have been suppressed in the process.

Part Two – Perceptions of the Ideal Discourse

In this part of the analysis, we look at employees' various perceptions of the ideal discourse. As noted, perceptions are important to explore in order to analyse how the ideal discourse is reflected in organisational reality. We explore how employees' perceptions of this discourse and the way they talk about it works either as a way of reproducing the ideal discourse or as a way of challenging it. During the analysis, we highlight how context and issues of power play a role in shaping these perceptions.

3.6 Reproduction of the Truths of the Ideal Discourse

Since discourses are always constructed in social interaction, the reproduction of a discourse can be viewed as a way of co-constructing it. In the following, we identify a number of ways in which employee perceptions reproduce the ideal discourse in order for us to determine what kind of power the ideal discourse holds over the employees and how ingrained it is in the organisation.

3.6.1 We Complement Each Other

As accounted for in part one of the analysis the benefits of collaborating are an important theme in the construction of the ideal discourse. It appears that this has caught on with some employees who seem to reproduce the ideal discourse by talking about how collaboration with the other function is good for the organisation, primarily because HR and Communications contribute useful knowledge to each other:

In my experience, HR knows something about how to move people, whereas Communications to a greater extent knows how to create an organisational narrative; create the story of where we come from, where we are going. And in the interplay with HR, they can actually deliver on it. So, I think that supporting each other has great value when your task is to construct a reality as we do. (HR Consultant)

This employee emphasises the ability of Communications to tell stories and get information across, while HR knows about the people that need to believe in that story. He believes that the two functions can deliver this by collaborating. This is in line with what John highlights as the strengths of the disciplines; HR has the knowledge of the people in the organisation and thereby the ability to anchor initiatives and move people, but in order to motivate those people, they need proper communication

tools, which HR does not possess. The Communications Team Leader also stresses how her work activities “used to be more like mass communication, you can say it was more informative [...] Now, to a much larger degree, my work is about creating emotions and belongingness, loyalty and stuff like that.” When she states that her work is about creating emotions as compared to being predominantly informative, it implies that she perceives her work to be more about motivating people in the organisation, and she implies that this is a result of being combined with HR. This statement, we argue, reproduces an essential part of the ideal discourse; namely the importance of motivating people to get them to pay attention to and follow the overall strategy. Furthermore, one of the HR Consultants notes,

I see many advantages. Actually, I only see advantages. Because if we have to move people in an organisation [...] then, for me, it’s about ... articulating ... or constructing ... or unfolding ... a world that is more attractive than the one they come from.

What is interesting to note here is that he argues that he finds it solely advantageous to be merged with Communications, indicating that he may have consented to the ideal discourse. In turn, this reproduces the truth of the ideal discourse that collaboration between the functions produces a wide range of benefits, especially in relation to their focus on people, both leaders and employees. In this quote, the HR Consultant also emphasises the intention of “moving people” which implies that he finds it important to collaborate with Communications on handling change and development in the organisation. The idea that changes are occurring all the time, and are therefore more important than ever to deal with, is another truth the ideal discourse dictates. In this way, the ideal discourse is reproduced by the HR Consultant when he stresses how the department should move people by articulating an attractive world. We argue that this is reproduction because essentially moving people is about getting them to consent to desired organisational changes, and to do this HR needs the help of Communications.

Moreover, some employees perceive the functions’ different strengths to be an advantage. For instance, one Communications Consultants says,

It’s a strength that we look at things differently [...] There are many things that you can’t solve just like that. And then it’s nice to have some people that are used to lengthy processes and are consensus-oriented, right? [...] Those differences make us help each other getting things done, and that, I think, is an important strength about us working together.

Here, the Communications Consultant stresses how she perceives the difference between the functions; that HR is more process- and consensus-oriented than she considers the members of the Communications team to be, and she emphasises that these differences are valuable and strengthening. This perception is in line with how John describes the benefits of merging the two; that their different capabilities complement each other. One of the HR Consultants also points to this: “[...] obviously, Communications are the ones who describe the universe, and we, in many ways, deliver content to that universe.” Here, he describes how he perceives the aims of the two disciplines; HR as creators of content and Communications as describers of that content. It appears he perceives the disciplines as complementing each other, and we find that he considers this division of roles a positive thing for what the department is supposed to achieve. The HR Consultant’s use of the word “obvious” signals that he takes for granted that this division of responsibility is the right way to do it. Along these lines, the Communications Team Leader also finds that together they can create organisational narratives, and she explains how she feels her work has more timing now that Communications is combined with HR:

I can provide tools for the leaders to help them communicate better, and I do, but... the tools are only used... you only use a hammer when you have to drive in a nail, you know. And now I know when I have to drive in that nail, so to speak.

It seems that collaboration with HR has made the Communications Team Leader somewhat more aware of the purpose and the timing of her work, that is, she feels she has more knowledge about when and how to use her communication tools. This further paints a picture of Communications being perceived as the one providing the tools, and HR being the one providing the content, and these differences in work routines and roles are referred to as a good thing. As such, some employees reproduce the idea that the perceived differences between the functions are desirable. Further in line with this, one HR Consultant notes:

When someone has a communication background - even though I, too, have some knowledge of communication - I feel it’s natural for me to use them. Then they can ensure that my work is of high quality, and I can do the same for them, or even better; we can create synergies.

The HR Consultant seems to believe that the differences between the functions can be used to ensure the quality of each other’s work, which is one way that she reproduces the ideal discourse. In addition to this, there are a couple of other interesting things to highlight from this quote. First of all, she talks about the naturalness of the collaboration, which is also a point highlighted by John in the way he

constructs the ideal discourse; that this constellation is inherently natural. Moreover, she mentions the word “synergy” which is also a word commonly heard when talking about this constellation. As such, both John and the articles we have read concerning this idea talk about synergies as something that is supposed to happen when these disciplines are brought together. The HR Manager also points to these synergies: “Communications becomes an important tool for achieving success in an HR department... In that way, it’s easy to see how you may achieve synergies by merging them.” Thus, it seems that synergy is a word that is regularly used when talking about the benefits of collaboration, and it also appears that it becomes reproduced by some employees in CCLD.

On a final note, during a meeting about CPG’s engagement survey, we observed that the participating employees spent some time reinforcing the value of their own and each other’s work. First of all, the Communications Team Leader mentions how well the department is doing, especially when they benchmark against other companies. Secondly, one HR Consultant praises one of the movies that the Communications team has created, and they talk about how well one of their new initiatives - strength-based leadership - has been received in the organisation. As such, it appears that they confirm each other in what they are doing, and that what they do creates value for the organisation. In this way, their interactions during their meetings work as a way of reproducing the ideal discourse. We argue that this is an example of how a social structure, in this case a meeting, is both a result of as well as part of the construction of the ideal discourse; the meeting is only taking place because of the ideal discourse and the structures that this has brought about, and the ideal discourse seems to get reinforced by the existence of such meetings. Thus, structures brought about by the ideal discourse seem to also contribute to its reproduction.

3.6.2 We are Better Able to Handle Change and Leadership Development

Another important theme in the construction of the ideal discourse is the tasks that the combined department is supposed to collaborate on, namely change and leadership development. These tasks are where John sees the greatest potential in that they can contribute to increased performance. Apart from the functions working together on specific tasks, and as such are “forced” to collaborate, some employees do reproduce the ideal discourse when they talk about the tasks they collaborate on.

First of all, one HR Consultant argues that a big part of their collaboration is about “selling” their services: “[...] it’s about internal marketing and how to sell ideas to the leaders. It’s something HR traditionally has been bad at [...] It’s great that you now have someone to help you with that.” As such, she notes that together they are able to better convince leaders about the usefulness of their initiatives, something she finds HR has been struggling with. Secondly, a Communications Consultant notes how Communications have gained access to CPG’s leaders through this constellation, which she sees as beneficial: “what I think has been of most value to us is the access to the leaders through HR. That’s a great advantage... We’re really glad about that.” While the HR Consultant appreciates the help Communications has provided them with, the Communications Consultant appreciates that they now have access to a group of people that they did not have before, which indicates that both parties feel they have gained something from collaborating which benefits the leaders of the organisation. Finally, the Communications Team Leader notes,

Roughly speaking, right, you can say that internal communication owns the mass media, right? We have the intranet, we have the big screens, and we own e-mails. And you could say that HR owns the leaders, right? So you could argue that Communications gets... an entirely new medium, and that’s the leaders, right? [...] So I think the greatest advantage of merging them is that you now have more channels for reaching employees.

This quote highlights how she finds that the traditional distribution of “ownership” between the functions is dissolving, and instead they have blended into each other. This further emphasises how there is a perception of the importance of working together because it makes them better able to reach employees through the leaders of the organisation. Taken together, the way that employees talk about collaborating is contributing to the reproduction of the ideal discourse in that they highlight their weak spots and explain how working with the other function enhances each function’s ability to deliver on the assigned tasks. According to John, this is then supposed to increase performance, and some of the department’s employees do hint at this. One HR Consultant argues that “I think the value is that together we are really good at figuring out how to make our leaders better in a way that creates increased performance for all of CPG”. Thus, we argue, he reproduces the truth put forward by the ideal discourse that this constellation increases organisational performance.

Moreover, the employees mention some of the services they are developing. We previously noted how John is particularly proud of the performance conversations initiative, which one of the Communications Consultant comments on: “We offer performance conversations for everyone in CPG. And that would *not* be possible without us working together... because performance is of course an entirely new way for the leaders to work.” In this quote, she stresses that it would be impossible to deliver this service without HR and Communications collaborating. We find that this expression draws attention to how she takes for granted that the functions are able to deliver this by collaborating. As such, we argue that the employee reproduces the ideal discourse by emphasising the necessity of HR and Communications collaborating on delivering services to the organisation.

In addition, some employees argue that changes are something the functions should be able to handle well by collaborating. One Communications Consultant feels that “we are definitely able to do things that can support the changes carried out by HR.” By this, she implies that their work on making organisational changes has benefitted from the tools Communications provide. In line with this, the HR Manager argues that:

If I were to point out one thing that’s really made a difference, it’s our ability to handle organisational changes... I believe that we are way better at handling these than when we were independent, and... we are better at making communication plans, we are better at getting the right people involved at the appropriate steps in the process and things like that. Clearly, we have professionalised the way we handle organisational change.

Here, the HR Manager explains how he finds that collaborating with Communications has enabled HR to work more professionally with the changes they need to handle in the organisation; he finds that they clearly have better communication activities as a result of being combined. This is interesting seeing as we previously noted that he appears sceptical towards John’s initiative. In spite of this, we find that the HR Manager’s perception seems to have been influenced somewhat by the way John has attempted to diffuse the ideal discourse, even if only slightly. When we suggest that he has only been slightly influenced, it is because the HR Manager continues by questioning whether this improvement is due to the combined department, or whether it is simply because “we have become more experienced [with organisational changes] in recent years as the organisation has changed almost constantly.” Though this can arguably be viewed as a way of challenging the ideal discourse, we argue

that this example illustrates how the ideal discourse may still get underneath your skin, even if you have a predominantly sceptical perception of it.

Lastly, a couple of employees call attention to the benefits of collaborating when working on CPG's intranet. For example, one Communications Consultant states,

One thing that would not be possible if we didn't collaborate is our intranet [...] it was necessary to be together in this and so it was just great that we had just been merged [...]. Otherwise, it would simply be more difficult. It made our work a *lot* easier.

This can be viewed as reproduction of the ideal discourse since she perceives it as very advantageous that HR and Communications work together on developing the company's intranet, since she finds that it would be much more difficult to collaborate had they not been merged. In other words, she suggests that sitting together physically makes a difference for how well you are able to collaborate. The physical proximity touched upon here is another recurring theme when the employees talk about the merging of the functions, something to which we now turn.

3.6.3 We benefit from being physically close

As illustrated in part one of the analysis physical closeness is important to John since he expects that it fosters knowledge sharing between the functions, and this knowledge sharing is supposed to lead to better collaboration. We find that several of the employees share this perception. For instance, one of the Communications Consultants argues that

It shouldn't be this way, but physical proximity is just *enormously* important for how you collaborate. You can create as many processes, meeting structures, and all sorts of things as you want, but the physical setting just means *so* much. [...] So the fact that we are placed together automatically provides us with something we wouldn't have if we weren't.

This employee seems to attribute a lot of value to being physically close to the other function; so much that the mere presence of each other provides the foundation for collaboration. It appears she believes they would simply not be able to perform their mutual tasks without it, not even if all the appropriate processes and meetings were in place. She also suggests that in theory they should be able to collaborate without being physically close, but in reality she thinks that this is not possible. Along

these lines, one HR Consultant argues that being physically close “undoubtedly creates something good [...]. We know – and a lot of research points to this as well – that as soon as you separate people physically, it won’t be long until the value diminishes.” By using the word “undoubtedly”, the HR Consultant takes for granted that physical proximity will generate value for the collaboration, and in perceiving it as such, he reproduces the ideal discourse. Additionally, we find it interesting that he refers to research because it gives the impression of him trying to strengthen his argument through this. As such, it seems he believes that there is no point in questioning the importance of this, if research says that this is the case.

Finally, the Communications Team Leader points to the everyday benefits of being physically close: “Sharing the same space [is beneficial] because it makes it a lot easier to just call out to a colleague in HR and say “let’s grab a cup of coffee” when you need to discuss a task informally.” She continues by noting that these “mini meetings” take place several times a day. To her, it seems that a lot of tasks are more quickly solved simply because of the access they have to each other, simultaneously indicating that this would be much more difficult if they were separated.

Taking all of this into consideration, we argue that the employees reproduce a truth of the ideal since they perceive that being physically close is necessary. Seeing as many of them feel that physical closeness is essential, we suggest they may feel strongly urged to collaborate simply because they share the same space. Moreover, when the employees deem physical proximity important, they simultaneously consent to the premise that it is necessary for HR and Communications to collaborate in general. Hence, if this was not the case, discussing physical proximity, we argue, would likely not have been of any relevance to the employees in the first place.

3.6.4 Working together is natural

A final way that we noticed some employees reproduce the ideal discourse is the way that they talk about the naturalness of the constellation. One HR Consultant comments on the merger by saying, “It’s cool and it’s great. And to me it’s completely natural and I use them [Communications] a lot.” This expresses that she perceives the collaboration between the functions in a very positive way, or at least it seems that this is what she wishes to emphasise. It is interesting that she notes this at the end of our interview with her, while earlier she stated that:

[...] unfortunately, most companies place HR together with something else, often it's the CFO or the Manager of Administration who's responsible for HR. And here it's John, a Communications professional, who oversees HR. And I think it works very well.

Even though it appears she wants to be perceived as enthusiastic about this constellation, when she employs the word “unfortunately”, it indicates that she might have some reservations about it after all. This suggests that in an ideal world, she would probably prefer to have HR as an independent department, even though the constellation seems to be work for her, now that things cannot be any different. Thus, we find that in spite of her reservations, she reproduces the ideal discourse by stating that it feels natural for her.

Others also comment on the naturalness of the constellation, for example the Communications Team Leader: “I benefit greatly from it. I would too if I was placed in Sales [...], then sales aspects would automatically be a large part of what I do. I mean, it's a natural way for me to work.” As such, she finds it natural to work with HR, but this is probably more due to her ability to work with other people in general than it is because of the inherent naturalness of this constellation. Still, this serves to reproduce the ideal discourse, we argue, because ultimately she finds it natural to be organised this way. Overall, these statements illustrate that often perceptions are not clear-cut; rather, the same employee might express diverse attitudes towards the same thing.

If the naturalness of collaborating is not necessarily due to the HR and Communications constellation, then it becomes interesting to explore if contextual factors contribute to this perception. We find that all of the employees describe how the department is doing well and that the people in the department generally like each other. For instance, the HR Manager comments on this:

It's a great place to work. And particularly these years it's fun to be here... CPG is doing well... and it's only natural it rubs off on everyone. [...]. And just like everyone else here, I think I have some great colleagues.

For him, the fact that CPG is doing well financially coupled with a feeling of having great social relationships makes it a great place to work. He also seems to have a perception that everyone believes they have great colleagues, something one of the HR Consultants also notes: “Socially... there's a great working environment. So it's not difficult to reach out to each other. It works really well.” He emphasises how he perceives the social relations in the department to be strong, which he finds makes

it easy for him to reach out to his colleagues. In line with this, the Communications Team Leader says that she is proud to be in a place where "there are so many great colleagues who really want to make a difference", and she continues by stressing the importance of personal relations for healthy collaboration:

I feel they're my colleagues. I mean, of course it's dependent on who ... 'cause personal relations are also very important. There are some that I find it easier to collaborate with than others. But I have a healthy collaboration with them all. I mean, the professional aspect is what's most important, but of course there are some people whom I enjoy working with more than others.

The Communications Team Leader draws attention to how she collaborates well with everyone in the department, which she seems to find important because they need to work together professionally. At the same time, she suggests that there are particular individuals whom she works better with than others, indicating that personal relationships matter to her. As such, we find that the way these employees talk about each other points to how the "naturalness" of the HR and Communications constellation may be partly due to the employees having strong personal relations.

Furthermore, we find it important to draw attention to how employees generally seem to consider CPG a great place to work. This, we argue, is a relevant contextual factor to bear in mind when discussing reproduction of the ideal discourse. The Communications Team Leader points to how she "can really identify with what we do. We really make a difference for a lot of people [...] I think we do a lot of good things that I can be proud of." She underlines how she finds that CPG makes a difference in people's lives and that this makes her feel proud to work for the company. One of the HR Consultants also notes,

I am really happy to be here. I am proud to work for a company that is decent, so to speak... which treats its employees well. I mean, we have high ethical standards and take responsibility for the surrounding society.

This employee, too, emphasises how she feels proud to work for the company because it is ethically responsible and treats people well. Likewise, a Communications Consultant notes how CPG is good at taking care of its employees because they "work with people's insurances, illness, death and misfortune. So we know that things like these happen in people's lives [...] and I just think that it's great to work for a company that cares about people." With this quote, she highlights how the company

is handling sensitive issues for people, hereby implying that the work they do is of great importance to a lot of people. Taken together, these quotes illustrate how the employees feel proud to work for CPG and consider it a respectable place to work. We argue that this is an interesting factor to consider when looking at how the employees reproduce the ideal discourse. Since the employees are content with and proud to work for the company in general, they are likely to feel a sense of loyalty towards the company and therefore, we propose, they might be more likely to accept the initiatives the company presents them with, including the ideal discourse.

Taking all of this together, it seems that employees reproduce most of the truths that the ideal discourse puts forward which we argue points to how they appear to accept it, and thus, we argue that the ideal discourse has an impact on organisational reality. Moreover, when the employees reproduce the ideal discourse, they co-construct it at the same time. This, we suggest, contributes to giving the ideal discourse a form of legitimacy, seeing as it becomes reinforced by the employees diffusing it. Moreover, we argue that the employees reproduce the ideal discourse because it interplays with other discourses that are widely consented to, namely those of change management, leadership development, and performance. Since the ideal discourse draws on other discourses that are ingrained in the organisation, we argue that it becomes somehow easier for the employees to accept its principles, and therefore it might be difficult to question, at least openly. In this way, reproduction can also be viewed as an example of how the ideal discourse has power over the employees, which we argue is helped along by the employees having strong personal relationships, that the company is doing well financially, and that they seem to feel proud to work for the company.

3.7 Challenges to the Truths of the Ideal Discourse

In this section, we present various employee perceptions which challenge the ideal discourse by working more or less directly against it. Along the way, we draw attention to how contextual factors as well as relations of power may influence the employees' perceptions of the ideal discourse.

3.7.1 This is not a tailored solution

As mentioned previously, John refrains from calling the merger between HR and Communications a “trend”, however, he does acknowledge that other companies have done the same. Interestingly, we

find that some of the employees employ the word “trend” when talking about the idea of merging HR and Communications. Though John arguably attempts to attribute the idea of merging the departments to himself, some employees describe how they believe CPG has been influenced by other companies:

It was during those years where Danske Bank still was something special in Denmark. [...] The big companies have a lot of influence. And when Danske Bank decided to combine their Communications and HR departments [...] this was of course noticed, and I think they [senior management] were inspired by that. Because it was like “well, this is probably the trend, it is probably a good idea to follow if they do it”, right? (HR Manager)

The HR Manager explains how he views CPG’s relationship with other large Danish companies; since these companies are part of setting the standards for success and CPG benchmark themselves against them, it becomes hard to disregard their practices. In other words, the HR Manager perceives this merger between HR and Communications as partially due to CPG being seduced by a trend in the market. Consequently, he attributes the idea of merging the two functions to external factors rather than to John. A former HR Partner in CCLD comments along the same lines:

The fact that you happen to find the solution to combine it [HR] with Communications, I think is connected to the fact that it was a trend in the market at the time. We were not the only ones who did this, there were many who did this, and Tryg were famous for having done this – they were some of the first who really beat the drum for it and said “we have merged them because they’re the same” and things like that.

This employee not only makes it seem like John stumbled upon the idea rather than having an epiphany about merging the functions, she also seems to ridicule the basic idea by employing irony in the last line of her statement. We argue that the way these two employees openly express that they perceive the merger as a trend, which works to diminish the importance of the ideal discourse. If CPG is merging these departments because everyone that matters seem to be doing it, then it no longer appears to have the element of uniqueness that John emphasises. In this way, these employees can be said to challenge the ideal discourse by attempting to undermine the value of merging the functions. Moreover, the HR Manager does not believe that this trend is going to last. He makes use of an analogy in order to explain how he views what is currently happening with the HR and Communications constellation:

A lot of companies have tried to combine it [the payroll office] with something else, and after some years, they put it another place, maybe back to its original placement. That's how I view what's going on with HR and Communications. It's been a trend... lasting for some time, but I don't think it's going to last forever.

He draws on an example with the payroll office and how it is often located under different functions in an organisation, and he does so in order to illustrate how it seems to be a coincidence where departments are generally situated. To him, sometimes it is simply a matter of testing constellations, and if unsuccessful, it can always be changed. It seems that the HR Manager does not believe that the HR and Communications constellation is an eye-opening solution, and as a consequence, he believes that it is not going to last.

While other employees do not mention the word "trend", they still hint at how they find CPG acts on something because it is popular at a given time. The Communications Team Leader points to this by describing how their communication tasks have changed during her years with the company:

First came the staff magazine, right, that was the big epiphany within internal communication. And then came the intranet which was then the new epiphany, right. And now it's leadership communication. [...] Now we're on all three steps simultaneously, right. But that's how it is, that's the way we're headed.

It appears, then, that she accepts these different "epiphanies" that occur from time to time by stating "that's how it is." Yet, at the same time her statement indicates that while one may have an epiphany, this might not remain the sole way of conducting one's business. As we have explained earlier, leadership development, and part hereof is leadership communication, is a topic which many companies spend time and energy on, CPG included. However, this may change in the event that someone has a new "epiphany". With this we argue that the Communications Team Leader is unconsciously challenging the ideal discourse. Since leadership development is one of the key elements of the ideal discourse, it becomes problematic for John if ever this topic loses its momentum because it entails that he can no longer advance this argument for having HR and Communications combined. One of the Communications Consultants believes this may come to pass as CPG tends to switch focus quite often:

Internally, we say that "the personnel always move" [laughs]. That's old. That is, you reorganise and you move around, and our CEO always says that "if you're not developing, then you're dismantling",

things can change so of course it's likely that we are going to be placed with someone else if another focus becomes important.

This employee highlights how they are used to reorganisations depending on what the senior management believe is right at the time. Simultaneously, she suggests that the functions may not continue to stay merged if it is decided that something else makes more sense. In saying this, we argue that she unintentionally questions the longevity of the HR and Communications constellation, and by extension the ideal discourse. We find this to be unintentional because she follows up by saying that she would be sorry to see the functions being separated again as she believes they “make each other better.” Furthermore, one of the HR Consultants describes how she finds that CCLD is influenced by “buzzwords”:

It's like... “now we need to do some talent management” and all sorts of buzzwords, and then some leadership pipeline, and then we read a lot of theories about that, but nobody actually bothers to ask the organisation “what do you actually need out there?”

The HR Consultant questions the department's use of what she thinks are popular theories or ideas because they are not grounded in demands from the organisation. In other words, she believes that instead of adopting “buzzwords” or topics that are popular at a given time, it is more useful to ask the organisation what they need and thus adapt accordingly. We suggest that she indirectly points to how they in CCLD tend to be seduced by “trends” that do not necessarily originate from organisational needs, thereby also implying that this might also be the case with the HR and Communications constellation. As such, she challenges the ideal discourse, seeing as John attempts to construct it as if it is a direct response to what the organisation needs.

Together, these examples illustrate how the employees perceive the ideal discourse as a trend, and that these perceptions reflect a predominantly sceptical, if not negative, attitude towards trends. In one instance, it seems the idea is even ridiculed because it is perceived as such. Consequently, we argue that these employees' perceptions challenge the ideal discourse by questioning its originality, longevity, and rooting in organisational needs. Moreover, though we illustrated earlier how the employees perceive change to be necessary, it seems that the discourse of change simultaneously prompts employees to take various new initiatives, including the HR and Communications merger, less seriously because they are used to initiatives not lasting particularly long.

3.7.2 Professional differences are frustrating

We find that the strong belief in professionalism, which we briefly mentioned earlier, seems to influence how the functions perceive each other and the discourse. Several of the employees point to professionalism, or function-specific expertise, when asked about how they perceive the organisational culture. One HR Consultant notes: “professionalism, to be an expert at what you do, that’s important.” In addition, the HR Manager notes how this is characteristic for CPG: “I think we’re characterised by high professional standards and, like, professional pride. Many skilled colleagues, I have to say [...] that’s great.” He finds that not only is professional standards important, so is professional pride. As such, we argue that a discourse of professionalism appears to exist in CPG, and it seems quite pervasive. John also emphasises professionalism: “the organisation is characterised by a high level of expertise. It’s inspiring [...]. We assign much importance to professional expertise and we demand our leaders know their subject. Because then they’re in control.” Thus, it is considered valuable and a source of respect if organisational members, employees and leaders alike, are highly qualified at what they do. The quote from John also implies that not only do employees attach importance to their colleagues and leaders being competent, it is also of high priority to management. It appears, then, that knowing your business is considered a way of gaining respect and thus a way of being in control. Thus, it seems that the discourse of professionalism is so taken for granted by organisational members that it has become an organisational ideology, and this ideology seems to permeate the organisation as well as the perceptions of the employees.

This strong belief in professionalism seems to have played a role when the functions were merged. For instance, the Communications Team Leader mentions how the pride in one’s own area of expertise shone through, especially among the HR professionals: “some were kind of protective about their own area of expertise in the beginning.” A former HR Partner also notes how many HR professionals felt uneasy about the transformation as it meant they had to share their knowledge with others:

[As an HR professional] you were used to not being able to talk about what you do with other than fellow HR people, and then we suddenly had to share it with translators and employees from the press function and ... people you didn’t think had anything to use that information for.

From what she expresses, it seems that this new way of working together and the talk around it – with emphasis on collaboration, being open and sharing information, along with the strong focus on the group – have been difficult, especially from an HR perspective. The tendency to be stuck in silo-

thinking, which John found existed in CPG, was exactly what he sought to eliminate, but these demands appear to have been more difficult for HR to meet than for Communications, whom according to a Communications Consultant are used to “shouting across the table.” The same employee notes that “some of the people from HR felt like Communications was taking over HR [...]. We were the ones who had the director with us. We got to keep John.” Thus, the new ways of working were perceived to be in contrast to HR’s old ways, and coupling this with the fact that Communications had their current director with them, and HR did not have one, seems to have prompted many HR professionals to perceive the merger as a degradation of HR as a discipline.

The lack of a director with HR experience is also mentioned by the HR Manager: “We get a director that has no HR knowledge at all ... and Communications, which, seen from an HR perspective, is not as important as HR, [...] still gets to take up the most space.” This downright scepticism from the HR professionals about having a Communications professional as the head of their field might be due to the pervasive ideology of professionalism that makes organisational members feel proud and protective of their own area of expertise. This pride appears to make the HR Manager label his own area as the most important, and consequently it seems he perceives it as even more degrading having a Communications professional as the head of his field.

Not only did the ideology of professionalism play a role in the implementation stage of the merger, it appears to still exist. For instance, one HR Consultant mentions how she does not understand why HR Consultants are not more involved in the strategic work of CCLD: “[the managers] don’t have a background in HR, none of them do, so why don’t they involve us experienced consultants in the work?” This quote illustrates her concern about the fact that her managers do not have a background in HR, and she implies that they need to get experienced consultant to participate in the strategic work in order for it to be done properly. Her statement points to how she takes for granted that knowledge of the subject is considered crucial in the daily work. It seems the perception of her leaders lacking the proper knowledge is a source of frustration for her, which indicates that she feels the professional capabilities are not exploited enough.

Moreover, another HR Consultant mentions how it is noticeable that John does not have as much experience with HR as some of his employees:

He understands concepts quite easily, but of course, when we start to speak in HR lingo and talk about management theory and all that, you see him get a bit confused and [you can see him] thinking; what the hell are they talking about?

While this HR Consultant believes that John is competent, he simultaneously finds that he has a hard time keeping up once the conversation turns very HR-specific. So even though John is generally well-liked, some employees seem to feel that he does not have so much knowledge about HR. In line with this, the HR Manager mentions how he believes that:

If all the people in a department were all dedicated to the same discipline to a certain extent [...], and if you had a leader who does not necessarily need to be educated in the discipline but at least hopefully has a burning interest in the subject, and thus doesn't have to divide his or her attention between two disciplines, then I think you would have a stronger HR profile.

The HR Manager implicitly expresses how he believes that John does not have the desired interest in HR, and that he finds it problematic that he has to divide his attention between two disciplines. In stating this, the HR Manager, along with some of the other employees, undermines John's ability and authority to lead a combined HR and Communications department by highlighting his lack of HR expertise. It appears, then, that the general level of professionalism is perceived as having taken a dive with the merger of the departments. This perception can be considered a challenge to the ideal discourse in that the ideology of professionalism challenges the truths of the ideal discourse by suggesting that valuing the expertise of each function takes precedence of belonging to the group.

We suggest that the ideology of professionalism makes it more difficult for the HR professionals to accept the truths of the ideal discourse because they feel they lack a director with sufficient knowledge of HR. As a consequence, it seems the ideal discourse is perceived, primarily by HR professionals, as threatening the ideology of professionalism and their preferred ways of working. Thus, we argue that while the ideal discourse seems to challenge the ideology of professionalism, the ideology of professionalism challenges the ideal discourse in turn, and as such, we advance the argument that that there is a continuous struggle over power taking place between the two. We find that this serves to underline how different contextual aspects and relations of power, such as John's relationship to the CEO, the HRCOM discourse in society, as well as the impression that John is generally well-liked, has probably played a substantial role in how the ideal discourse has gained influence, considering how it has managed to compete with such a pervasive organisational ideology as that of professionalism.

It appears, then, that the ideology of professionalism makes organisational members take much pride in their area of expertise, and perhaps because of this, they are used to being aware of what makes them unique compared to other functions. Since this ideology is so taken for granted among organisational members, we suggest the ideal discourse is likely to make a deliberate display of how the disciplines are not similar and that the members generally have different mind-sets. As such, the construction of the ideal discourse seems to be somewhat influenced by the ideology of professionalism, meaning that it does not ignore that each function perceives itself as having unique qualities. The ideal discourse presents these differences as a good thing and highlights how their qualities complement each other and, as we saw from the way some employees reproduce the ideal discourse, differences *do* get perceived as being beneficial in order to handle the new demands of the department.

However, it seems that professional differences are not always perceived as beneficial. We find that the employees tend to verbalise differences quite a lot, and in many instances it seems they perceive them as somewhat problematic for the relationship between the functions. For instance, the Communications Team Leader notes:

We are different, we have different cultures [...]. In the Communications team we are quite result-oriented. It doesn't have to be an art [...] whereas my experience is that they are more process-oriented in HR [...]. It has opened my eyes to the fact that the process is important too. But you know, sometimes it's enough to drive you up the wall, and I think they feel the same way about me, that I am sloppy and so on... so there are definitely some challenges in our fundamental ways of thinking.

The Communications Team Leader highlights how the differences between HR and Communications sometimes frustrate her. Interestingly, she perceives the primary difference between the functions to be the same as what John highlights; Communications as result-oriented and HR as process-oriented. In this way, she somewhat reinforces the ideal discourse, however, she points to the perceived problems of the difference instead of how it makes both disciplines better, and as such we suggest it becomes a challenge to the ideal discourse. Simultaneously, by stating that her job doesn't have to be an art, she indicates that HR professionals tend to approach their work as such, which she seems to find overly time consuming. Moreover, as we observed a meeting about engagement surveys where the participants at one point discuss information on the intranet, the Communications Team Leader mentions how "it doesn't have to be amazing, as long as it's not downright incorrect." This attitude indicates how her focus is primarily on getting things done and fine-tuning it later, and as such, she

plays down the importance of what she perceives as “slow” processes in HR. A Communications Consultant also comments on how she finds that the functions have very different working methods:

We are very specific [in the way we work] [...]. We just need to produce and publish something and if we get it wrong sometimes, oh well, then we adapt and go in another direction. Quick decisions, fast flow, news come and go at a rapid pace ... And, where the people from HR... seen from my point of view, there is an *enormous* amount of process. It takes forever.

Besides from describing how she views herself and her fellow Communications colleagues as high-paced and quick to respond, she stresses the word “enormous” when she talks about HR’s work routines. This implies that she finds it annoying, perhaps slightly ridiculous, that everything seems to be taking a long time to complete, which is further underlined by her adding how things take “forever” in HR. Thus, she too verbalises differences between the functions and talks about them as a hindrance for effective collaboration.

The Communications professionals are not the only ones who perceive differences between the functions, the HR professionals also point to this. For example, the HR Manager mentions how he finds there are differences in the urgency of tasks:

[In HR] we’re always very busy, that’s no secret. And in my experience – and they may find this unfair – I feel that Communications, that’s ... there are few tasks that they *have* to do. And they spend a lot of time with “we could do this, or we could do that, or maybe we could just leave it, if we don’t have time”... And ... I don’t think it’s just a feeling because at the moment they have two people on leave [...] and in spite of that, the people that are left don’t seem overburdened.

As such, he too finds that there are differences, albeit his understanding of the situation differs from the general view of the Communications professionals. Where the two Communications employees feel their work is deadline-based and that they generally have to move at a quick pace, the HR Manager experience almost the opposite; namely that Communications does not seem to have many urgent tasks and that they have a larger degree of freedom. He even goes as far as stating that they don’t seem overburdened, even though they suffer from under-staffing. This indicates that he regards HR as the more important function of the two. In addition, this gives the impression that he finds it irritating that Communications seem to have a larger degree of freedom in terms of the tasks they are expected to do. We argue that the physical proximity between HR and Communications may

contribute to these perceived differences as it provides a rich opportunity for organisational members to observe their colleagues and thus compare their work with their own. Had they not been merged into one department, we believe the HR Manager would probably not let these issues become a matter of frustration, and thus he would have fewer opportunities to think about whose tasks are more demanding.

Contrary to what the discourse puts forward, the employees appear to perceive differences between the functions as frustrating and it even seems to make the HR Manager deem his function more essential to the organisation than that of Communications. Arguably, the deliberate verbalisation of the different strengths of the disciplines that the ideal discourse puts forward – albeit positively framed – as well as the physical proximity that is a part of the ideal discourse, seems to prepare the ground for organisational members to become especially aware of the differences between them. In turn, this perception of differences as being disruptive challenges the ideal discourse as it seem to counter its purpose of collaboration, teamwork, and belonging to the same group.

This illustrates how the professional differences which appear to exist between the functions are not naturally occurring, but rather discursively constructed. As such, both John and the employees construct differences, although in different ways. While John attempts to construct professional differences as advantageous, the employees' perceive professional differences as frustrating. Thus, the meaning of the ideal discourse becomes altered through the employees' perceptions.

3.7.3 The purpose is not clear

While John appears to believe that the purpose of the merged department is quite clear, it seems that some of the employees are not sure how to use their colleagues from the opposite function. For instance, one of the HR Consultants describes how he is not particularly aware of what they do in Communications:

Basically, I don't know a whole lot about what's going on, and I'm more preoccupied with my own tasks, which means that I don't naturally ask [for help from Communications] [...]. So I don't quite know how to contribute. Maybe that's really what the challenge is.

The HR Consultant suggests that even though the two functions are close to each other, at least physically, it is not enough to ensure that the employees know the affairs of the other function, nor

how they are supposed to contribute to each other. This is interesting seeing as how we have previously illustrated how several of the organisational members, John included, emphasise the importance of physical proximity when it comes to collaborating. On the contrary, this employee finds that he is typically more immersed in his own tasks, and consequently he forgets to draw on his colleagues' capabilities, something John stresses as being of key importance in order to perform. Not knowing the current state of affairs is something a former HR Partner notes too: "I think they're still in doubt about what they need to exchange and what they are actually exchanging", indicating that this was also the case when she was working in CCLD. It seems that her view is that the employees in the department in general do not know how to make use of each other. Although John may have a clear image of how things should be, it appears that this is not necessarily the case for his employees. One of the HR Consultants comments on this:

John has a picture of how things should be, and he is the boss of it all, so for him it probably makes perfect sense. I'm not so sure that it makes just as much sense for the people in the functions. So for John, there's a lot of hard work to be done in order to get them to play together.

In stating that John is "the boss of it all", it indicates that people are used to management making decisions without involvement from the employees. At least on the face of it, John is the one painting the picture – a picture the employees appear not to be painting with him. Moreover, by stating that it probably does not make "as much sense" for the employees, he indirectly suggests that the functions do not currently work together the way it is expected of them, in spite of the norms put forward by the ideal discourse. Additionally, the HR Consultant says that he is unsure whether "we ever get there [to where collaborating is natural]... I don't know. But maybe it's not so important." In other words, he believes it does not really matter if HR and Communications ever find a common ground where everything comes together. With that, he challenges a core aspect of the ideal discourse, namely the collaboration itself, which John perceives as natural and essential for performance.

While some employees are unsure about how to use their colleagues from the opposite function, other employees describe how their roles in this constellation are unclear to them:

There are no clear division of roles here, not at all. I'm used to completely clear [role] descriptions, that you know "what is my role, what is needed in order for me to be a success, how am I supposed to do it, what is my contact surface?" [...] There are grey areas between Communications and HR [...]

[that] contribute to create an environment of insecurity. What is the HR Team Leader responsible for, and what is the Communications Team Leader responsible for? (HR Consultant)

This HR Consultant appears to be frustrated by the lack of clarity in her tasks, which she suggests creates an insecure environment where one does not feel confident about the distribution of responsibility. Interestingly, the grey areas, which she points to, is one of the reasons why John thought of the constellation in the first place since they, for him, indicate the natural overlap between the functions. Yet, rather than resulting in the functions coming together, as intended, it seems that these grey areas between HR and Communications are perceived as a hindrance in terms of clarifying professional roles, and by extension how to work together. The HR Manager also comments on the division of roles:

From time to time there is [uncertainty about division of roles]... I think ... I believe John and I have a pretty good picture of it [...] but I'm not so sure there's the same level of clarity if you ask the individual employee.

The HR Manager recognises that, every now and then, employees get confused about their roles in the department, though he finds that he and John have a good overview. Though he does not comment on the unclarity the employees seem to perceive in the division of roles, John does agree with the HR Manager about the overview. He believes that roles have become clearer and that people are more “effective in their roles today” than was previously the case. Yet, this sentiment does not appear to be one that his employees share. As such, we argue that the employees’ perceived lack of clarity in their roles challenge the kind of collaboration that John is aiming for. Arguably, if one does not know what he or she is responsible for, it becomes difficult to collaborate.

Moreover, some employees are confused about the goals of the department and themselves. One of the HR Consultant states that: “In reality, there’s a lack of knowledge about goals in terms of where we’re headed. That’s a bit unclear.” During the cross-functional meetings, we also observed this confusion. For instance, we noticed how the meetings themselves appeared to be unstructured and lacking a clear purpose. Instead of appearing to have a common goal, it seemed that it was more about informing the other function about the tasks they were working on, rather than figuring out how to use each other to make each other’s work better, something which John believes they should be able to. In addition, during the meeting about engagement surveys, two of the employees talked about how they do not

know “what John has in mind.” One of the HR Consultants also describes her lack of knowledge about the management’s goals:

I have no idea what my boss’ goals are. [...]. Nobody in our team does. She hasn’t shared that with us. [...]. And of course there’s the hierarchical aspect... “I’m a manager, there are things I keep to myself which my employees don’t need to know”. [...]. And I can’t even discuss it with her because she can’t even understand me when I’m talking to her about it. Because she’s not there yet. *Of course* she doesn’t want to share her goals with me. It makes me think “why is that obvious?” [...]. I really want to run, I want to work and I want to run really fast, do everything I can, but I have no idea what I’m supposed to be running after.

This quote is interesting because she not only highlights that she is confused about goals, she also explains how she finds that goals are not shared because of the hierarchical culture in the organisation. It appears the company’s hierarchical structure makes managers keep things to themselves, and that this is considered an “obvious” thing to do. Indeed, several of the employees describe how the organisation is highly hierarchical. One of the Communications Consultants notes that “you shouldn’t be tricked by the informal ways of talking, that we’re all on first-name basis. [...] It’s a financial company and it *is* hierarchical. You quickly become aware of that. You need to learn to work with that.” By stating this, she stresses how the organisation may appear informal upfront, but that it is nonetheless hierarchical, which is something you have to get used to. Both the HR Consultant and the Communications Consultant draw attention to how you need to accept that the organisation is hierarchical, and consequently, it becomes hard to challenge this setup by suggesting that things could be done differently. This is reflected in the HR Consultant’s quote when she says “I can’t even discuss it with her because she doesn’t even understand me.” It seems that her perception is that her ability to know what she is running towards is prevented by a hierarchical culture where it is not common to share things. Hence, we find the hierarchical culture and its influence on the employees challenge the ideal discourse by complicating the exchange of information between people in the department, which according to the ideal discourse is needed if they are to benefit from each other’s capabilities.

Yet, while the employees do not seem to know what the department’s goals are, the individual employee still needs to perform, which is probably a result of the company’s increased focus on performance and performance conversations. As such, we noticed how some of the employees tend to disregard the hierarchical structure in order to get things done. One of the HR Consultants says:

I've said "fuck this, now I'm going to do exactly what I want" – create my own presentation, don't discuss it with my boss, complete it by myself, and then I go talk to John about it and give him my recommendation. And he just thought it was the greatest. I've done that twice.

It seems that this employee's frustration about the company's hierarchical structure has made her take matters into her own hands so that she is able to deliver on her assignments. Interestingly, she draws attention to how her position in the hierarchy is not necessarily a hindrance to her ability to influence by stating that "John thought it was great." This signals that hierarchy, though perceived as being strongly present, is not always considered that important. Another HR Consultant also illustrates this, and he adds that a lot of people work individually:

If I have a project, then I go straight to John. That means I skip two steps. That in itself... We can draw our department in nice little boxes, but that's not how we work at all, if you actually look at it. I run my own projects by John, and if I have something with communication elements then I run it directly by the Communications Team Leader. So, a lot of people work very individually. We are very individualistic. [...] And no one seems to mind [because no one comments on it].

According to this HR Consultant, it is up for discussion how useful the hierarchical structure is when he states that they do not work according to the "departmental boxes" anyway. Rather, he argues that people tend to skip a couple of levels in order to get to the people who can make decisions. As a consequence, this appears to entail that organisational members run their own one-man-shows, turning focus on the individual rather than the group, which is otherwise an important truth of the ideal discourse. Yet, no one seems to mind, which both of the HR Consultants illustrate – not even John seems to mind even though he talks about the importance of the group and not the individual. What is interesting, though, is that John describes himself as having "an impatient approach to solving tasks", which is perhaps why he accepts it when people approach him directly instead of their team leaders.

Taking all of this into consideration, it shows that the employees perceive the HR and Communications constellation as somewhat confusing and this, we argue, challenges the ideal discourse. The confusion around how to use each other, roles, and goals coupled with the pressure to perform seems to prompt employees to disregard the social structures and John's preaching about the group in order to influence and get noticed for their work. In addition, as the employees are skipping hierarchical levels and appear preoccupied with their own tasks, it produces a state of confusion that challenges the intended collaboration that the ideal discourse instructs.

3.7.4 We compete for attention

We previously illustrated how John stresses the importance of the group and solving tasks in collaboration. Even so, it seems that some of the employees feel somewhat torn over who gets attention in the department. The Communications Team Leader notes:

I feel... because John is a Communications professional... I feel I can just run my own show, really. Whereas I feel that he spends energy on HR [...] Really, everyone wants the attention of the director [...]. But I also like my freedom, so I'm in a, I feel like I'm in a dilemma because I really like to have that freedom, but of course I would like a little more attention. [...] But basically, I think I would rather have my freedom, so that's okay. [...] Some of the tasks they have over there [in HR] get more attention from senior management, so it's only natural that John puts his energy there.

In this quote, the Communications Team Leader expresses several things. First of all, she argues that she more or less decide the direction of her team without much involvement from John because they are both Communications professionals, and this she appears to accept seeing as she appreciates the freedom it gives. Secondly, she seems to accept that John spends more time on HR-related tasks because HR generally gets more attention from senior management. Finally, she suggests that everyone seeks the attention of the director, and she thinks it would not hurt if she got “a little more attention.” What is interesting about this quote is that it seems she is trying to find excuses for why she does not get more attention than she does, suggesting that maybe she does not really accept it after all. One of the Communications Consultants also appears to struggle with this:

[long break] Aaahh, you know what, I can't really ... I think it's hard to ... that is [sighs] I don't think we get special treatment in Communications, we're not that many, right, and we have ... there are simply more HR professionals and they have more tasks to cover, so that's fine, right ... So, yes ... I have no problem understanding that.

The Communications Consultant responds to a question concerning how John distributes his time between the functions. Knowing this is relevant as John notes how he spends most of his time on HR-related tasks, perhaps partly because of his lack of HR experience. What is interesting about this employee is that whenever the topic turned to John, it seemed she attempted to avoid saying anything that could come across as negative. We find this is perhaps due to her overall loyalty to him and the company, which she expresses by saying: “[I'm] super loyal because they've been incredibly loyal to me.” Still, we find this quote of relevance as her hesitation indicates that, like the Communications

Team Leader, she wants to appear fine with it, while she at the same time tries to find excuses for why John spends more time with HR. It should be noted that the question was not whether Communications gets special treatment because John has such a background, yet it appears that she wanted to make sure that she did not give the impression that John plays favourites. Interestingly, one of the HR Consultants feels John does just that:

I think there are a lot of managers – and this is my experience – who fall into the trap of thinking that if someone’s competing for their attention it’s pretty great. For their vanity. And that’s really damaging for performance. *Really* damaging. And I think it’s there. With John. So that means... I’m not saying he cultivates it, but maybe it’s fine by him that they’re fighting a bit for his attention and he can say “now *she’s* in, or now *she’s* in”.

What is interesting about this quote is that by saying “I’m not saying he cultivates it”, she seems to inoculate against being perceived as unfair towards John. Regardless, she appears to believe that John has fallen into a trap where he does not mind when people compete for his attention, and she suggests that this is damaging to their performance. We argue that part of this may be due to John having to divide his time between two functions with different areas of expertise, something the HR Manager also points to: “[we have] a serious amount of focus areas, and... that can be hard at times, and you compete for resources and time.” It seems, then, that the organisational members are in a struggle with each over who should get attention from management. According to one of the HR Consultants, receiving attention is about being able to speak the same language as management:

If we take the Communications Team Leader, she’s a skilled Communications professional, she probably has some difficulty finding a common ground with John sometimes, whereas the HR Team Leader is better at speaking the same language as John. She’s maybe less HR-focused, really, she has more of a managerial background, so therefore it’s in different ways they can influence John... but it’s clear there’s something about who’s best of the two. I think there’s a little game going on there. That is, who gets to set the agenda?

Though it looks as if both the Communications- and HR Team Leader are able to speak John’s “language”, the HR Consultant suggests that his boss is slightly more skilled at this due to her managerial background. That is, he finds that she gets to realise her agenda more often than the Communications Team Leader does, and he notes that, in general, there is a “little game going on”

between the two team leaders. One of the other HR Consultants describes how she has experienced this element of competition during her day-to-day work:

I definitely get the feeling that every now and then there's an element of competition between us and Communications. [...] Last year our Communications Team Leader ran some IT workshops about how the leaders should communicate and all that. I've noticed... that my boss has been *really* dissatisfied with that. Now *I'm* taking over the workshops and the Communications Team Leader has helped with some of the communication, and I can feel she really wants to do a movie, and she wants to justify that Communications needs to have a part in this, whereas I'm like "I don't care about that movie". I've seen some of the other movies and I think... [...] It's fine that she wants to do a movie, but it shouldn't compromise the workshop.

Looking at this quote, the HR Consultant describes a number of interesting aspects. Firstly, she draws attention to how the responsibility of tasks is switching between the functions. Here, the example is an IT workshop which used to be handled by Communications and which is now the responsibility of HR. Her statement suggests that this might be because the HR Team Leader is dissatisfied with the fact that Communications has handled a task which has traditionally been the job of HR. As such, we argue that the HR Team Leader may have exploited her ability to influence John in order to alter the distribution of tasks between the two functions. Secondly, though the IT workshop is now the task of HR, she thinks that the Communications Team Leader is still trying to justify her part in the process. We suggest that by doing this, she aims to show management that her team is adding value, which she considers crucial seeing as they are constantly reminded that they need to perform. Third, the HR Consultant explains how she does not care about Communications' movies and that they should not compromise her workshop. In stating this, we argue that she diminishes the work Communications is doing when she describes how she believes it is going to detract from her work. Finally, seeing as the HR Consultant describes how the Communications Team Leader attempts to include a movie in the workshop, we argue that this may be an attempt to regain some of the power she lost when HR took back the task. As such, it seems there is a struggle over power taking place between the two functions.

It appears, then, that rather than collaborating, the HR and Communications professionals spend some of their time competing for attention and resources, which according to one HR Consultant may be due to a lack of motivation:

It would be really great if intrinsic motivation was the driving force. That is, if I reached out to Communications because I wanted to and I could see that doing it creates an incredible amount of value for me. In contrast to extrinsic motivation where you put up some... goals... it might be... it's not likely they are as attractive to chase necessarily, because we have our own agendas and things on the line. Sometimes it's really [...] difficult to create an environment where you *want* to work together.

The HR Consultant explains how management's goals are not always attractive to pursue because employees from both functions have their own agendas. In addition, he finds it hard to reach out to colleagues from the opposite function with professional matters, since he does not believe it creates that much value for him. As a consequence, it appears to be more out of necessity than desire when he works with the Communications professionals.

Overall, we find that the employees perceive that there is competition for attention and resources between the functions, which seem to have arisen out the ideal discourse. While the Communications professionals seem to excuse John and accept that he spends more time on HR, the HR professionals are more pronounced about the level of competition and struggle over who gets to set the agenda. In turn, this makes them focus on their own agendas rather than adhere the group and collaboration philosophy of the ideal discourse.

3.7.5 There is no point in merging us

As illustrated, employees unconsciously challenge the ideal discourse in a variation of different ways, and we have identified how contextual factors and relations of power influence their perceptions. Furthermore, some employees more deliberately question the idea itself, for example the HR Manager:

It's been five years and I still need to read a convincing case illustrating that this really makes sense. [...]. I mean, this way of organising can work and you can easily draw the organisational chart, there's nothing to it. But don't expect to achieve a lot of synergy and that it'll make a lot of sense strategically.

While he consents that this way of organising of HR and Communications can work, he also stresses how he does not buy the argument that merging these departments will lead to synergies or that one should combine them for strategic reasons. Stating this without the trace of doubt gives the impression that he challenges the ideal discourse deliberately, especially since he uses the exact same examples as

John when he contradicts it. Thus, achieving synergy and getting the functions better anchored strategically are exactly what John regards as some of the primary advantages. It seems, then, the HR Manager is highly aware of the aspects that John wishes to emphasise, and thereby how John attempts to construct the ideal discourse. This is further illustrated by the following comment from the HR Manager:

Take some of the articles published about CPG, which you have probably read, where John has talked to different representatives of the media about the reasons for doing this [merging the departments]. And it might sound pretty convincing, but ... well, it hasn't convinced me.

The HR Manager makes no secret of the fact that he perceives John's appearances in the media to be an attempt to convince people about the advantages of this constellation. Nor does he hide the fact that he does not find his attempt particularly successful. Thus, it seems that he does not ascribe much value to the truths put forward by the ideal discourse. This indicates John's attempt to diffuse the ideal discourse by means of external media does not necessarily affect employees as intended, at least not the HR Manager.

As we saw earlier, the HR Manager also talks about how he believes that John has been doing some lobbying in order to get his agenda through. Since he clearly does not accept the premises of the ideal discourse, it appears he perceives John's motives for promoting the idea to be primarily about increasing his area of responsibility in CPG. Therefore, it seems that he attempts to somewhat undermine the idea of combining HR and Communications. However, he further notes that:

If you ask top management, I definitely think they would say it's a success. So it's not to degrade it, I just think maybe we have simply been lucky that the people here work well together and that we have some great resources.

What is interesting here is that while he obviously challenges John's arguments, he also explicitly inoculates against being accused for degrading the idea. Hence, he might feel that his attitude towards it can be perceived as exactly that. Yet, he does not refrain himself from continuing talking about how CPG has just been lucky that this constellation is working all right. By stating that "it's not to degrade it", it comes across as an excuse for him to express his opinions. This shows how he is aware that his opinions would probably not be well received by top management, John included. Nevertheless, he is not afraid to express them, and he further states that:

There are some simple reasons [for merging HR and Communications]. I mean, you can easily become better at writing and there are some that are good at proofreading and stuff like that. But that's not a *strategic* reason to merge the departments.

The HR Manager stresses several times how there are no strategic reasons to merge the functions. It appears, then, that he perceives the ideal discourse merely as empty words. When asked if he believes the tasks they currently work on could be handled without being merged, the HR Manager says: "yes, absolutely." As such, he does not disagree with the general perception that change and leadership development are important topics, but he does not find merging HR and Communications to be the solution for handling these issues. He further adds: "we work with Corporate Finance, but that doesn't mean we need to be merged with them. Really, you should only be merged when there's actually more you collaborate on than not." In stating this, the HR Manager indirectly suggests that HR and Communications ought not to be merged because there are not enough cooperation interfaces between the two, and with that, we argue he directly challenges the foundation of the ideal discourse.

The HR Manager is not the only one who seems to question the foundation of the ideal discourse; one of the former HR Partners does so too. She provides an example of how she finds that merging the functions can seem pointless:

We have just had a round of layoffs this Monday. We had to lay off nine employees and we announced an organisational change yesterday. Then, this morning, Communications published a real "happy go lucky" article about our IT Director and his work. Extremely bad timing, there's not much else to say, other than extremely, extremely bad timing, and it just shows me that it's not coordinated, so to speak.

Ideally, HR and Communications are to collaborate closely on organisational changes, and by providing this example, the former HR Partner wishes to illustrate that they do not seem to do so. She would have expected Communications to know about the announced organisational change in IT since they are located together with HR, and thus she feels that Communications should have known that publishing the article would be inappropriate. As a result, she perceives the department as being uncoordinated. She stresses this by using the word "extremely" several times, which implies that she finds it to be an almost incomprehensible mistake. By referring to the article as a "happy go lucky" article, she implies that she finds the situation rather ridiculous. Seeing as the functions are physically placed right next to each other, it seems to make her perceive it as even more ridiculous than had this

not been the case. Thus, this event has led her to perceive the department as uncoordinated, which makes her ridicule it. This challenges a central truth of the ideal discourse, namely that organisational changes are better handled when HR and Communications are placed closely together and thus have increased opportunities to share information.

Overall, these employees perceive the collaboration interfaces between HR and Communications as limited and they even find that the tasks they are supposed to collaborate on are not necessarily improved by the disciplines being physically merged. Consequently, some employees feel that there is really no point in merging them. We argue that this perception challenges the ideal discourse because it sharply contrasts the truths of it.

3.8 Concluding Part Two

In part two of the analysis, we have illustrated how the ideal discourse becomes both reproduced and challenged by the way the employees perceive it, and how context and relations of power influence these perceptions. We have identified four ways employees in CCLD reproduce the ideal discourse. Firstly, the employees feel they benefit from collaboration because the disciplines bring different strengths to the table, and thus they feel they are able to complement each other. Secondly, it appears they believe that in combination they are better equipped to develop leaders and handle changes and this is seen as necessary in order to increase organisational performance. Thirdly, they appear to consent to the idea that physical proximity is crucial in order for the functions to collaborate in the best possible way. Lastly, some employees perceive this constellation as natural, albeit not necessarily for reasons that directly relate to the discourse. As such, it appears that the ideal discourse has some power over the employees whom in this way help co-construct and diffuse it.

Moreover, we have identified five ways employees challenge the ideal discourse. Firstly, the employees appear not to believe that combining HR and Communications is a tailored solution, but rather they talk about it as a trend, which they seem to perceive as something negative. Thus, they challenge the discourse by questioning its originality, longevity, and rooting in organisational needs. Secondly, the pervasive ideology of professionalism in CPG appears to influence how the employees perceive the ideal discourse, and by extension each other. As such, the ideology of professionalism challenges the group mentality of the ideal discourse by suggesting that the expertise of each function takes precedence of this. Though the ideal discourse draws on the ideology of professionalism by

verbalising the differences between the functions as strengths, some employees turn this upside down by perceiving these differences as a source of frustration. Thirdly, the employees appear to perceive the ideal discourse as confusing. Seeing as they are in doubt about how to find a common ground, it prompts them to act individually in order to live up to the demand of performance. In turn, this challenges the collaboration that the discourse urges. Fourth, there seems to be an element of competition for attention and resources between HR and Communications. This appears to make employees focus on their own agendas, and this behaviour challenges the ideal discourse by countering teamwork and collaboration. Lastly, a couple of employees seem to question the entire *raison d'être* of the department, and thus they deliberately challenge the foundation of the ideal discourse.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS

Discussion of Implications

In this chapter, we discuss the practical as well as theoretical implications of our findings. The discussion is divided into three separate parts. In the first part, we discuss the practical implications that arise from our analysis, and in doing so, we suggest factors that the organisation needs to pay attention to going forward. Next, we discuss how our findings contribute to our understanding of the relationship between the HR and communication disciplines on a theoretical level. Finally, we discuss implications on a meta-level by illustrating how our findings contribute to the theoretical field of management fashions with an enhanced understanding of how a management fashion can be produced and consumed in an organisation.

4.1 Practical Implications

Our analysis points to a number of practical implications for the organisation and its members. As illustrated in part one of the analysis, the ideal discourse is constructed in an inherently normative way by suggesting how the employees should behave. In addition, the discourse has an element of conformity embedded as it appears employees need to follow these rules and norms if they do not want to be considered a problem that needs fixing, and in that way the ideal discourse works as a way of instilling the right kind of behaviour in the employees. In other words, the discourse becomes a source of control, and it does so in at least two different ways.

Firstly, the ideal discourse has an impact on the structural reality of the organisation which in turn works as one form of control. With John being able to convince the CEO that HR and Communications should be merged, it automatically brought about a change in work routines. The ideals of the ideal discourse has made an impact on the organisational setup, and along these lines Alvesson and Kärreman (2004) suggests that “people’s ideas and norms [can] lead to the construction of rules enacted in a bureaucratic way” (p. 427). By this, they point to how an idea may turn into structures creating rules for behaviour, which we argue is the case with the ideal discourse. This kind of control can be understood as one that explicitly targets employees’ behaviour which Alvesson and Kärreman (2004) describes as a *technocratic* management control form. With this, management employ various work standards for procedures, outputs and skills, along with direct supervision and mutual adjustment to make sure tasks are coordinated (Ibid.). This appears to be exactly what John is doing, seeing as

how the functions are now sharing the same physical space, they have to participate in cross-functional meetings every week, and they have to work together on various tasks. All of these are structures the employees cannot escape since doing so would make them a problem to be “fixed”.

Secondly, the ideal discourse attempts to influence how the employees should think and feel about this constellation which can be viewed as a second way of controlling the employees. As mentioned, the different strengths that the HR and Communications have is something they ought to feel they can benefit from, meaning that together they should view each other as stronger than they are separately. Not only are they supposed to feel that their professional capabilities are enhanced, they also have to act as a group, performing as one rather than as individuals, leaving behind the so-called “silo-thinking”. These examples look like attempts to influence employees’ perceptions of the collaboration between HR and Communications, thus targeting the minds of the employees. This type of control form can be labelled *socio-ideological* where management attempt to persuade employees to “adapt to certain values, norms and ideas about what is good, important, praiseworthy, etc. in terms of work and organizational life” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2004, p. 426). The ideal discourse can be viewed an attempt to do this, that is, setting up norms and expectations for what HR and Communications should be able to successfully deliver in unison. In addition, we previously noted how John believes that this department is rooted in an organisational need, indicating that the ideals put forward by the discourse is what he thinks it will take to make sure that the organisation benefits from HR and Communications collaborating. In relation to this, Alvesson and Kärreman (2004) notes that managers often advance values and ideals because they themselves really believe in them or because they believe the company will benefit from the employees believing in them. In this case, we suggest that it is a combination of both; John seems to be fully committed to these values, probably because he considers himself the inventor, and he also believes these ideals are in the interest of CPG. Taking this into consideration, we advance the argument that the discourse attempts to control employees’ minds by persuading them to live by certain norms.

Taken together, we find that these two forms of control are employed in an effort make sure that the employees behave and think in a desired way, which in turn may partly explain why the employees reproduce the ideal discourse. However, at the same time it is also possible to imagine a scenario where this could lead to active resistance from the employees if they feel too restricted by the ideal discourse. As the analysis illustrates, in some situations this might already be the case. Simultaneously,

it appears that the strong personal relations between the employees coupled with their loyalty to the company may also work as a form of self-discipline. Since they seem to like each other on a personal level as well as respect the company, they may be more prone to accept the constellation in spite of what they think about the idea itself.

Our analysis also revealed that the pervasive ideology of professionalism seems to influence how the employees perceive the ideal discourse. This ideology seems to prompt employees to value function-specific expertise and take much pride in their own area of expertise, and that this becomes a way of challenging the ideal discourse, which otherwise attempts to instruct employees to value the group and their common tasks above all. As such, there seems to be a struggle for power between the ideology of professionalism and the ideal discourse.

Thus, we suggest that the ideology of professionalism, which is arguably very influential, seems to take precedence over the ideal discourse. We suggest that this is due to the ideal discourse being perceived by some organisational members as undermining the importance of professionalism, and this, it appears, is not well received among them. The ideal discourse can therefore be regarded as a threat to the ideology of professionalism. It is possible that the ideal discourse works to reinforce the ideology of professionalism, albeit unintentionally, as it triggers employees to feel extra protective of their professional capabilities and by extension their respective functions. In turn, this seems to be a threat to the ideal discourse.

This shows how the ideal discourse clashes with the ideology of professionalism which is important to pay attention to. Yet, we acknowledge that it may be difficult to notice these dynamics as ideologies are per definition taken for granted by organisational members. Since the ideal discourse and the ideology of professionalism clashes, we find that the employees appear to resist the ideal discourse simply by consenting to the ideology of professionalism. In line with this, when exploring work/life balance in a Swedish company, Wieland (2011) found that “resistance to the company view occurs through collective, normative, consent to the cultural view [in this case the Swedish cultural value of *lagom*] than through individual acts of deviance”, and this kind of resistance she labels as unobtrusive. Thus, according to Wieland organisational members can resist the company view simply by consenting to a cultural view. We draw on this point to illustrate that by consenting to the cultural ideology of professionalism employees simultaneously resist the ideal discourse, however, in an unobtrusive manner. This is not to imply that the two are necessarily mutually exclusive, but that perhaps the

ideology of professionalism is consented to in order to escape the norms of the ideal discourse. Seeing as resistance in this case happens in an unobtrusive manner, it becomes difficult to detect these dynamics. However, this is precisely the reason why it is important to be aware of the conflict that seems to exist between the ideology of professionalism and the ideal discourse.

Another implication relates to the way the ideal discourse emphasises different strengths. Although well-intended and positively framed, this focus seems to have an unintended side-effect in that it increases awareness of differences between HR and Communications, ultimately making differences a source of frustration. We find that this intense verbalisation of different strengths is likely to be part of the ideal discourse due to the pervasive ideology of professionalism. Consequently, the ideal discourse unintentionally creates perceived differences. One common perception of difference among the employees is the belief that members of Communications are “result-oriented” and members of HR are “process-oriented”, which is also illustrated by the way HR professionals seem to perceive themselves as more thorough in their ways of working than their counterparts in Communications. This perceived difference between the two is interestingly enough also assumed by the ideal discourse, as verbalised by John. We suggest that by assuming that there are differences between the functions, the ideal discourse instructs members of CCLD to pay attention to these differences, albeit unintentionally.

In line with this, Just and Remke (2012) advances the argument that differences cannot be assumed beforehand. They suggest that differences may or may not arise from social interaction, and seeing as possible differences only arise in the meeting between people, one cannot and should not attempt to predict courses of interaction (Ibid.). We find that John assumes differences in his verbalisation of the ideal discourse, and we believe that this may be problematic. By categorising the functions and the abilities of the members, the ideal discourse seems to create stereotypes that urge members of the functions to behave in a particular manner as well as viewing other members in a particular way. Arguably, this leaves little room for interpretation, and thus the chance of a Communications professional being process-oriented or an HR professional being result-oriented, or the possibility that one can be none of these or in-between, does not seem to be considered. The discourse, then, appears to divide people into categories which they may feel urged to conform to, even though they are not necessarily aware of this. In addition, it seems that the discourse prompts organisational members to emphasise their belongingness to a certain group and comparing their group to the other, rather than stressing belongingness to the department as a whole.

In order to depict the implications of the differences the ideal discourse constructs, we find it useful to compare it to Litvin's (1997) findings about workforce diversity. In her paper, Litvin suggests that the contemporary discourse of workforce diversity, through essentialist assumptions, "creates and reinforces divisions" (p. 207). She further argues that diversity discourse instructs people to attribute others' behaviour and attitudes to category memberships, and as such she considers the diversity discourse divisive. Though Litvin explores workforce diversity and thus refers to categories such as race, gender and age, i.e. categories which serve to classify individuals, we believe her findings are useful to illustrate how we find that the ideal discourse comes to be divisive. By classifying members of each function in terms of certain characteristics, the ideal discourse instructs members of these to attribute members of the other function's behaviour and attitudes to their "category membership". In doing so, it looks as if the discourse creates and reinforces differences, which we suggest creates a gap between the functions.

What is more, we suggest that the physical proximity brought about by the ideal discourse plays a role in reinforcing and maintaining differences, albeit it is perceived as necessary. As shown in Figure 1 (see page 11), the department is divided into teams of different professional capabilities. This means organisational members are placed with people who are supposed to share the same capabilities as themselves even though they are all supposed to share the same goals and collaborate on the same tasks. While the department is likely to be structured in this way due to the ideology of professionalism, we argue it becomes a physical manifestation of differences and thus it may contribute to enhance the perception of difference. As we find that the perceived differences are considered a source of frustration by employees and it even seems to bring about competition between the functions, we argue that this perception may become disruptive for the collaboration this constellation is supposed to trigger.

Furthermore, we have illustrated how several of the employees perceive there is competition between HR and Communications, and some even believe that John tends to play favourites. It seems to become a game of agendas, that is, those who are able to influence and persuade management get their ideas through. In such an environment, we argue that it is hard to prepare the ground for collaboration seeing as everyone has their own agenda and things on the line. Currently, it looks like the HR professionals are more apt at getting their agendas heard entailing that Communications may be overlooked in the process. This hints at how Communications may be the "weaker" part in the

constellation when it comes to attention and allocation of resources, which is for instance indicated when one of the HR Consultants mentions how the Communications Team Leader struggles to get her part in a workshop. Granted, HR is responsible for a broader range of tasks and they count more people, which one of the Communications Consultants also notes. Yet, since the purpose of the merger is to get the functions to work together and contribute equally to each other, then it is curious how it appears they are not of equal standing. A well-known saying goes: “one should stick to one’s own class”, meaning that people get on better with those who are equal to them. It appears that the unequal access to attention and resources is giving rise to some tension between HR and Communications.

Another implication relates to the confusion occurring as a consequence of the ideal discourse. During our analysis we found that physical proximity does not guarantee that employees know what is going on; they do not know how to use each other or what their roles and goals are. Only John, and to some extent the HR Manager, appears to have a good idea about this, which is underlined by the employees appearing not to know what John is thinking. The grey areas between the functions, which John views as the primary reason for combining them, appear to trigger some confusion and uncertainty among the employees. In addition, employees tend to disregard the group in favour of running their own game in order to be able to perform - something we argue only contributes to this sense of confusion. This confusion, then, seems to become a way for the employees to do what they feel is right for them. What is interesting, though, is that the employees do not seem overly concerned about figuring out how to collaborate with each other. Instead, they take a more pragmatic approach; they solve issues as they arise instead of putting an effort into finding the common ground that John suggests, which signals that the employees are slightly indifferent about making the collaboration work, as long as they manage to complete their own tasks. Hence, it seems that tasks are not solved in the way the ideal discourse instructs. While the tasks get completed, and this apparently to John’s satisfaction, this does not seem to happen by group effort, but rather by individual effort. This indicates how the ideal discourse is somewhat disconnected from organisational reality, and perhaps that the tasks set up by John do not necessarily happen by group effort, which seems ironic since this is the entire point of merging HR and Communications.

Lastly, we find that perceptions of the employees are contradictory. While the employees seem to understand what John is attempting to do by merging the departments, which we suggest is why they reproduce the ideal discourse, they do not always appear to adhere to it in practice as reflected in the

ways they challenge it. Though these challenges do not appear to be a great issue for the time being, we suggest it may become problematic in the event that the employees start to challenge the ideal discourse more intensively. We argue that this scenario is not unlikely considering how the HR Manager seems to advance a different agenda for the HR function by suggesting that ideally it should be kept separate from Communications. In relation to this, we wonder if the HR Manager's predominantly sceptical opinion about the constellation is somehow impacting the two HR teams that he oversees on a daily basis. If so, it may contribute to our understanding of why the HR professionals generally come across as more sceptical than the Communications professionals. Since it seems that the members of the department have two bosses that have opposing ideas for how the two functions should be organised, it may become problematic if this reaches a point where it causes controversy between them. As such, we believe that it is necessary to pay attention to how the employees perceive the constellation, not just by conducting satisfaction surveys, but rather by being in touch with everyday organisational practices.

4.2 Theoretical Implications

As accounted for in the introduction of this thesis, not much is written in academia concerning the relationship between HR and Communications, and very little – if anything at all – has been written about combining the two into one department. Yet, the common view in existing academic literature on the topic is that HR and Communications departments should be kept separate, but collaborating closely. Thus, it appears to be widely accepted that there are blurred lines between the disciplines; however, there also seems to be a general view that Communications should be a proper area of its own. These studies, we have argued, are predominantly functionalist in their focus and the topic is mainly studied on a theoretical level. As such, we found that it was important to empirically explore this idea in order to develop an understanding of what happens when an organisation is influenced by the HRCOM discourse. In the following, we illustrate how our findings contribute to a novel understanding of the HR and Communications constellation. Apart from contributing to the academic literature on the topic, we believe our findings provide a useful contribution to the current debate around the benefits of merging HR and Communications.

Firstly, our findings illustrate that combining HR and Communications does not necessarily equal synergies merely because it appears to make sense on paper, such as the HRCOM discourse suggests.

At least, this is not possible to infer based on our analysis. On the contrary, our findings suggest that the heightened awareness about the different capabilities and what these are supposed to achieve together may have dark sides to it. This heightened awareness, then, appears to create unintended side-effects, such as confusion among the employees regarding how to collaborate and the division of roles, as well as perceived frustrating differences and competition between the functions. If present, the dark sides of the HRCOM discourse may run counter to the purpose of merging HR and Communications by hindering effective collaboration and undermining group belongingness. Based on this, we advance the argument that this forms a paradox; by creating unintentional side-effects that go against its own purpose, the HRCOM discourse seems to counteract itself. The heightened awareness that the HRCOM discourse puts forward can become problematic instead of favourable in the achievement of organisational goals. Our findings also suggest that physical proximity does not necessarily enhance collaboration between HR and Communications even though it is considered very important for the achievement of collaboration. Quite the opposite; we found that physical proximity, in this case, seems to contribute to perceived differences between the functions - when in sight, in mind. Thus, placing HR and Communications together in order to encourage collaboration does not seem to be the solution necessarily in spite of good intentions.

Yet, our findings suggest that an HR and Communications constellation *can* work in practice, at least we cannot assume otherwise based on our analysis. However, it appears that strong personal relations play a huge role in this regard. As such, it is not unlikely that many departmental constellations may work well in practice if its members have strong personal relationships. With this, we argue that it is probably not merging HR and Communications that makes the department perform – it may also be due to contextual factors. This is in line with our previous argument of how it cannot be assumed that this type of constellation results in synergies.

Furthermore, we can see how the discourse has created two types of control, structural and mental, which we find are in a dialectical relationship with one another. On the one hand, the HRCOM discourse sets up ideals that are materialised in the organisational work routines and hierarchical structure. On the other hand, these structures serve to reinforce the ideals put forward by the discourse. Together, we suggest that together these two control forms restrict the number of ways that employees can act and what they should think, leaving little room for interpretation.

Relatedly, our findings suggest that when there is a perception that everything is going well financially, organisational members are less likely to question the truths of the HRCOM discourse, even though they may find aspects of it frustrating. In this case, it is taken for granted by management that the company is doing well financially because HR and Communications are merged, and this perception, we argue, may lead to organisational members to think that they cannot do anything about it, since, on the face of it, it works. This may prevent employees from openly resisting and instead prompt them to find indirect ways of resisting. Interestingly, the aforementioned dark sides of the ideal discourse do not seem to get noticed by management, since the department is still performing as expected, which is further in line with the argument that it does not necessarily have to be because of this constellation that such a department performs well.

Furthermore, we find that context seems to be a decisive factor when it comes to how the HRCOM discourse influences an organisation. We find that social structures such as hierarchy, personal relations, work routines and relations of power may influence employee perceptions of the HRCOM discourse. Arguably, so may company-specific and societal discourses and ideologies, such as the ideology of professionalism, and the discourses of change, leadership, and performance. This means that the HRCOM discourse may be constructed differently in other organisations depending on company-specific social structures, values and norms. Equally important, it may be perceived differently by organisational members depending on company-specific social structures, values and norms. While unintended side-effects may not take the same shape in all instances, we argue that dark sides are still likely to arise due to various and often opaque contextual factors.

However, contextual factors may not only restrict the HRCOM discourse. Our findings also illustrate that widely accepted discourses, such as the discourse of change, may enable the HRCOM discourse by helping to justify its existence. Company-specific and societal discourses may thus provide an enabling foundation for the HRCOM discourse. Taken together, these findings suggest that one may not be able to predict employee perceptions of the HRCOM discourse and by extension what happens when an organisation merges its HR and Communications departments. Still, it appears that taking on the HRCOM discourse will not necessarily be frictionless. Even though the HRCOM discourse is considered a sensible solution to current challenges in organisations, it may create new challenges - at least, when we look at how employees perceive it.

Lastly, our findings illustrate how employees may accept the HRCOM discourse while at the same time challenge it through small acts of resistance. Thus, it does not have to be either one or the other. This indicates that the HRCOM discourse may take hold in the minds of people, but it also shows how it is not that simple. Employees may consent to the HRCOM discourse and express how they find it is a good idea, while at the same time consenting to discourses that compete with the HRCOM discourse, and in doing so unintentionally challenge it. Thus, employees may challenge the HRCOM discourse even though they appear to perceive it as a good idea. This illustrates that one should not rely solely on general opinions when determining the implications of the HRCOM discourse, because these may not reveal the hidden dynamics that may influence how it is perceived and acted upon.

4.3 Meta-Level Contributions

In the beginning of our thesis, we noted that we can understand the HRCOM discourse as a management fashion, but that existing theory in the field does not allow us to fully comprehend the process of adopting a management idea, particularly from an employee perspective. In this section we discuss how our findings more broadly contribute to our understanding of this.

We have illustrated how the Director of CCLD in CPG has used and is still using the HRCOM discourse to obtain and remain in his current position in the hierarchy. Yet, we find that securing this position has not been merely due to the inherently persuasive nature of the HRCOM discourse. Instead, we believe that timing has been of key importance in this process as pointed to in part one of our analysis; a number of companies were doing the same thing, there was a lack on an HR Director, and the organisation was facing a large-scale reorganisation anyway. These findings support the notion that management ideas may be used to secure power in an organisation (Sturdy, 2004), but that timing appears to also have in part in this.

In addition, it appears that other, quite fashionable, discourses – namely change management, leadership development, and performance – have influenced the existence of the HRCOM discourse in CPG. Hence, we argue that such ideas do not get adopted solely because they are guided by “norms of rationality and progress” (Abrahamson, 1996), but rather contextual factors surrounding a management idea may also play a role its adoption – something which is currently a poorly understood area in existing literature (ten Bos & Heusinkveld, 2009). As such, our findings contribute to the existing pool

of management fashion literature by highlighting how important the context appears to be for the adoption of a management idea.

What is also interesting about the HRCOM discourse's relationship with other discourses is that these can also be viewed as management fashions in their own right. In our introduction, we pointed to how leadership development, change management, and performance appear to be highly influential topics in contemporary society. Due to this, we argue that our findings illustrate how one fashionable management idea can be in a dialectical relationship with other fashionable management ideas in that they shape and legitimise the existence of one another. This shows how a management idea seldom stands alone, but that contextual factors, both internal and external to the company, influence it, and therefore should be treated accordingly.

Moreover, by analysing the construction and diffusion of the HRCOM discourse in CPG, we have shown how this discourse becomes a source of structural and mental control which seems to lead employees to reproduce the discourse put forward by management. In this way we suggest that a fashionable management idea may come to be a source of control, and that employees may be both consumers and producers of such an idea. That is, if the employees reproduce the management idea it suggests that they are also consuming it, yet these reproductions may also work as a way of co-producing the management idea by reinforcing the ideals it puts forward.

However, our findings suggest the employees do not only produce and consume the HRCOM discourse in CPG in a way that legitimises it; we have also illustrated how they are challenging it at the same time. For one, we have illustrated how the employees find a multitude of ways that they can escape the normative straitjacket of this discourse, even in unobtrusive ways by consenting to existing organisational ideologies. This supports the notion that contrasting attitudes of employees are a common response to the adoption of management ideas (Noon et al., 2000; Borial, 2003). For instance, while the employees in this case believe that they complement each other, they simultaneously find each other's professional differences frustrating. In light of this, we find that the way that the employees consume the ideal discourse, and the subsequent contrasting attitudes, work as a way of re-starting the production of the ideal discourse; by perceiving differences as frustrating rather than a strength, they alter the meaning of the ideal discourse. In this way, it illustrates that though a management idea might attempt to control employees by setting up norms and values, this does not entail that management can predict and control how the employees consume and produce the idea (see

also Kelemen, 2000; McCabe, 2011). By delving into how employees both co-produce and co-consume the ideal discourse, we contribute to an understanding of the employee not just as a passive receiver of management's initiatives, but rather an active actor in the production and consumption of fashionable management ideas. This also implies that employees are able to alter the meaning of an idea simply by how they perceive it.

On a different note, our findings suggest that management and employees alike may perceive a fashionable management idea as something negative, albeit for different reasons. Firstly, we have noted how the Director of CCLD attempts to distance himself from understanding the merger of HR and Communications as a "trend", or a management fashion. We have argued that this is because he perceives fashion to be the opposite of being "special" – something which is very important for CPG's self-perception. As such, we can see how he attempts to reframe the idea as if it is rooted in organisational needs. We believe there is also an aspect of power in this; if this is no longer considered unique, then he loses some authority and ownership of the idea, which we argue is part of the reason why he is in his current position. This is an example of how managers may consume an idea, yet simultaneously reframe it to fit own agendas. Thus, managers also co-produce the idea by altering the meaning of it and do not blindly adopt an idea because it speaks to rationality and progress. What is also interesting about the aforementioned findings is how the manager actively distances himself from calling it a fashion. This shows that even though many companies may be doing the same thing, managers may find that if it looks like they have "jumped the bandwagon" it will not be received well. Hence, it appears that calling it a fashion grates on the ear. In this way, we contribute to existing management fashion literature by showing how ideas may be perceived negatively if they are considered a fashion. This illustrates that even when a management fashion is considered a negative thing, managers may still adopt it.

Secondly, our findings point to how employees perceive the idea of merging HR and Communications as a "trend", or a fashion, which they consider to be a negative thing. In contrast to the Director, the employees in CCLD seem to believe that CPG is following the footsteps of other companies, and are thus only merging HR and Communications because others are doing it. This perception translates into various reactions from the employees – some appear to be indifferent because they find the company is always changing while others somewhat ridicule it. These findings contribute to the field by suggesting that employees may have negative reactions towards management ideas if these are perceived as a

“trend”. This further contributes by showing how a management idea may be considered a “trend” even though it is actively framed as the opposite, and finally the findings illustrate how it may be difficult to control employee consumptions of a management idea, seeing as employees are likely to be aware of the state of affairs outside the company walls.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Concluding the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore what happens when a company adopts the seducing idea of merging Human Resources and Communications into one combined department, an idea which we have labelled the HRCOM discourse. The importance of exploring this discourse lies in that its effects and impact on organisations and their members seem somewhat absent from academic discourse. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we have sought to explore the HRCOM discourse in Copenhagen Pension Group (CPG). We have done so in two ways. First, we have examined how the discourse is constructed and diffused by identifying the truths it puts forward. Second, we have explored how the discourse is perceived among employees of the combined HR and Communications department in CPG and how these perceptions are influenced by relations of power and contextual factors.

We have found that the HRCOM discourse in CPG is an *ideal discourse*, as it is constructed around at least four truths that set up norms and values for how employees should think and act. These ideals urge HR and Communications professionals to use their strengths in combination in order to create synergies and to collaborate on change processes and leadership development, which is expected to result in improved organisational performance. Physical proximity is expected to enable knowledge sharing, which is considered a necessity in achieving effective collaboration, and the department is framed as a tailored solution to organisational needs. The ideal discourse is diffused by encouraging employees to find a common ground through collaborating and by preaching how the group takes precedence of the individual. It is also diffused by the Director of the department expressing his expectations for the HR and Communications constellation externally. We have found that contextual factors, such as timing and other discourses, as well as power struggles over different agendas play a role in the construction and diffusion of the ideal discourse.

The way the employees perceive the ideal discourse illustrates how they accept it and resist it at the same time. On the one hand, employees reproduce the discourse when they describe how the functions complement each other, how they feel merging the departments has helped to better carry out the tasks expected of them, and how this is supported by physical proximity and the perceived naturalness of the constellation. Reproduction of the ideal discourse appears to be supported by strong personal relations between the employees, the company's financial well-being and loyalty towards the company. On the other hand, employees also challenge the ideal discourse, often unconsciously, in various ways. As

such, the merger is perceived as a trend, as being a source of confusion and competition as well as serving to highlight differences between the two functions. In addition, challenge seems to occur due to contextual factors, such as the performance discourse and the pervasive organisational ideology of professionalism.

These findings point to a number of practical implications for the organisation. Through its normative construction, the ideal discourse attempts to control the employees both structurally and mentally, which some employees seem to accept. Yet, it may lead others to actively resist if they feel too restricted by it. The ideal discourse also seems to clash with the ideology of professionalism, meaning that as employees consent to this ideology, they simultaneously resist the ideal discourse, albeit unobtrusively. Another unintended side-effect of the ideal discourse is that it constructs differences that seem to matter to the employees. The ideal discourse seems to put forward stereotypes of what it means to be an HR professional and a Communications professional, respectively. This, we have argued, leaves little room for interpretation, and it appears to create a gap between the functions. The construction of the discourse also appears to lead to competition between the HR and Communications, and it seems that HR is the more successful part in getting their agendas through. Though the basic idea behind the merger is equal contribution of the functions to each other's benefit, it looks as though they are not of equal standing, which may give rise to some tensions. The ideal discourse also advocates for the importance of the group, yet the employees seem to be slightly indifferent about making the collaboration work, as long as they manage to complete their own tasks. This suggests that tasks are not solved in the way that the ideal discourse instructs, indicating that the ideal discourse is somewhat disconnected from organisational reality. Currently, the different ways the employees challenge the ideal discourse do not pose a considerable threat to the survival of the department, but in the event that employees start to challenge the ideal discourse more openly, it may become problematic, which is why we have pointed to the importance of being in touch with everyday organisational practices.

Furthermore, our findings suggest a number of theoretical implications that contribute to our understanding of the relationship between HR and Communications. For one, merging HR and Communications does not necessarily equal synergies, at least this is not possible to infer based on our analysis. We have also found that there may be dark sides to the HRCOM discourse in that it may give rise to issues, such as confusion, competition, and differences, which paradoxically may counter its

purpose. These dark sides may vary depending on the organisational context in which the HRCOM discourse is situated. Our findings further shows that an HR and Communications constellation *can* work in practice. However, it may be more due to enabling contextual factors than because of the combination of these particular disciplines. One of the key findings of our study is that context, such as societal and company-specific structures, values and norms, seems to play a significant role in how the HRCOM discourse is constructed, diffused and perceived in an organisation. As such, it may become difficult to predict how the discourse, and by extension merging HR and Communications, will affect an organisation and its members. As a last point, we have found that employees may consent to the HRCOM discourse while simultaneously challenging it through small acts of resistance, which is why we have argued that attention to hidden dynamics, which influence how the discourse is perceived and acted upon, is crucial.

Lastly, our findings contribute on a meta-level to the field of management fashion theory because the HRCOM discourse can be considered an example of a fashionable management idea. This thesis thereby becomes an example of how a management fashion affects an organisation and its members. Our findings illustrate how a management fashion may be used to secure power, but that timing also seems to have a part in this. We have suggested that management ideas do not get adopted solely due to norms of rationality and progress, but that adoption also appears to be dependent on contextual factors as well as other fashionable discourses existing synchronically. Moreover, our findings indicate how employees, like managers, are not necessarily passive consumers of management ideas. Rather, employees may be active actors who both co-produce and co-consume such ideas, as is seen from the way employees simultaneously reproduce and challenge the HRCOM discourse. Their perceptions may even alter the meaning of the management fashion. We have also suggested that though a management fashion may be constructed in a normative way, employees may not consume it the way it is intended by management. Finally, we have found that both managers and employees may perceive a fashionable management idea negatively simply because it is fashionable. This may ultimately lead managers to distance themselves from the idea, and employees to express indifference towards it or even ridicule it.

In short, this thesis concludes that the HRCOM discourse as it is constructed in CPG is not necessarily perceived by the employees in the same way as is intended by the way management constructs it, and that the employees' perceptions of the discourse appears to have a number of unintended side-effects,

simultaneously challenging and ascribing new meaning to this discourse. Our approach has allowed us to uncover hidden relations of power and contextual factors that all play a defining role in the construction, diffusion, and perceptions of the HRCOM discourse in CPG. This has broadened our overall understanding of the relationship between HR and Communications, as well as of how an organisation and its members may become affected by management's adoption of a fashionable idea.

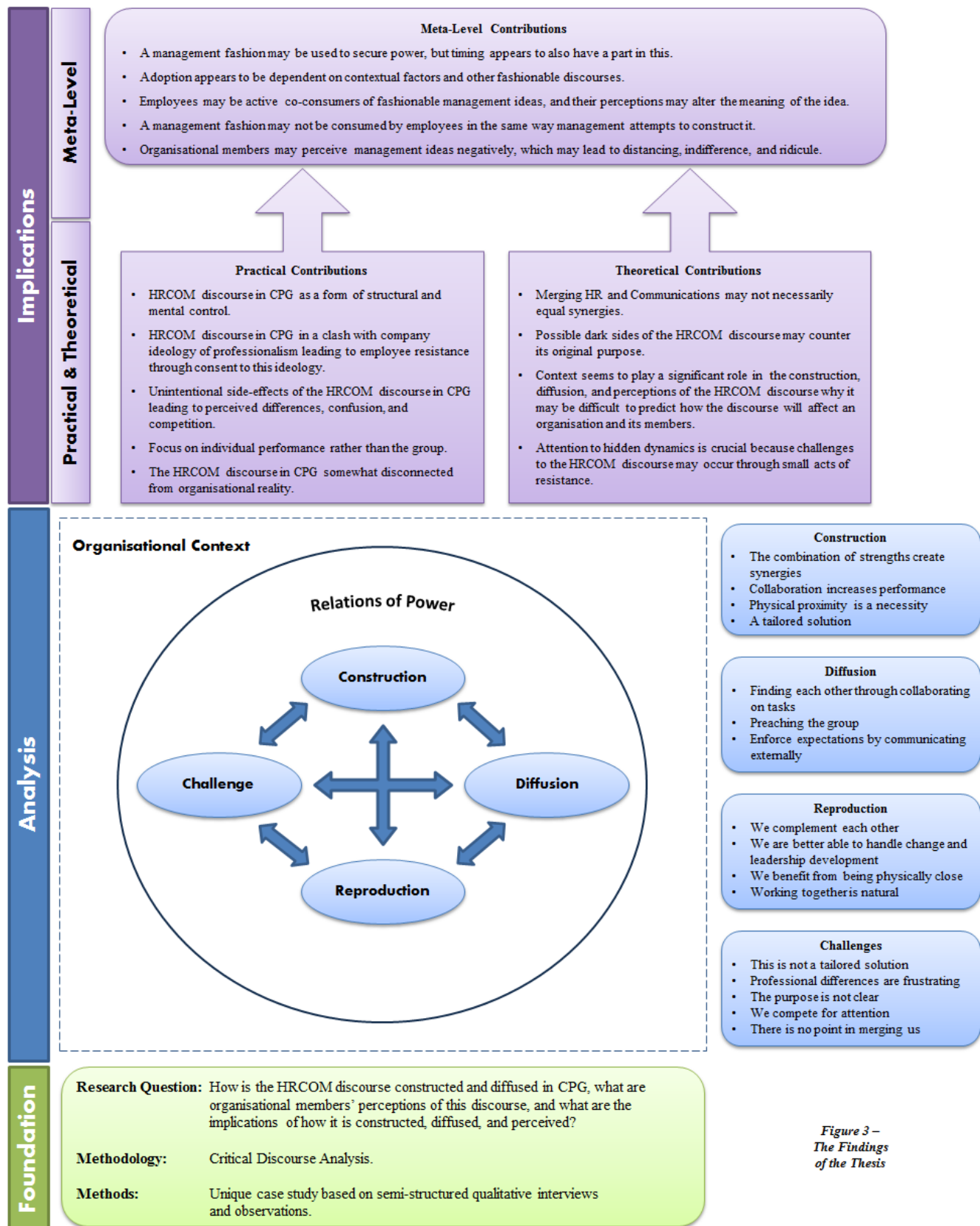


Figure 3 –
The Findings
of the Thesis

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

While this thesis has contributed to a broader understanding of the relationship between HR and Communications, we find that this topic is still in its infancy and would benefit from further research.

We have illustrated how contextual factors such as other discourses, ideologies, power, and personal relationships play a role in both the decision to adopt the HR and Communications constellation and how employees perceive it, but more research is needed into how influential contextual factors are in this regard.

We have also pointed to how the HRCOM discourse gives rise to perceived differences between HR and Communications that appear to be frustrating to the employees, and perhaps in some cases reinforce their professional standing. We suggest that additional research could pay attention to whether discourses of difference arise in other settings due to the existence of the HRCOM discourse, and how this affects employees' identity construction.

Though we attempted to look into how management diffuses the idea of merging the two functions, our knowledge about how employees act towards management's attempts to diffuse ideas could benefit from additional research. For instance, we have shown how employees are active actors in terms of both consuming and producing ideas, yet further studies could explore how employees may (un-)consciously seek to alter the intended meaning of a management idea through co-consumption.

Moreover, we have pointed to how managers and employees alike perceive a fashion, or "trend", as something negative which appears to lead to some distancing, indifference, or even ridicule. This is currently a poorly understood area in management fashion research and would as such be an interesting topic for further investigation.

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Appendix 1

Interviewguide til CPG – Corporate Communications and Leadership Development

BRIEFING

Præsentation af interviewerne og projektets formål

Tak fordi du har lyst til at deltage. Vi hedder Katrine og Stine, og vi læser en kandidat i erhvervsøkonomi og kommunikationsledelse på Copenhagen Business School. Vi er i øjeblikket i gang med vores kandidatafhandling på CBS, som handler om det at sammenlægge HR og kommunikation, og hvad dette har af betydning for de daglige arbejdsprocesser. Derfor interviewer vi dig og dine kollegaer for at blive klogere på, hvordan I oplever denne sammenlægning.

Rammerne for interviewet

Interviewet kommer til at vare ca. 50 minutter. Vi gør opmærksom på, at interviewet vil blive optaget på diktafon. Vi bruger optagelsen som støtte til vores hukommelse, og den vil samtidig indgå i vores arbejde med afhandlingen. Vi vil gerne understrege, at der ikke er nogle rigtige eller forkerte svar eller holdninger og vi forventer ikke at du svarer noget bestemt. Gennem dialog håber vi at kunne danne os et virkelighedsnært billede af jer, så derfor forventer vi, at du vil svare så ærligt som muligt på vores spørgsmål. Af samme årsag har vi valgt at anonymisere jeres navne i vores afhandling, så udtalelser ikke kan ledes tilbage til enkelte personer.

Min opgave er at stille spørgsmål og guide interviewet, mens min medinterviewers funktion er at tage noter og evt. stille uddybende spørgsmål undervejs. Hvis der er noget, som du er i tvivl om eller ikke forstår i løbet af interviewet, må du endelig sige til. Til at starte med, vil vi gerne vide lidt mere om, hvem du er og hvad din rolle er i CPG.

TEMAER	INTERVIEWSPØRGSMÅL
Præsentation af informanten	<p>Hvad er din rolle i virksomheden?</p> <p>Hvor længe har du arbejdet for virksomheden?</p> <p>Hvad er dine typiske arbejdsopgaver?</p> <p>Hvordan synes du, det er at arbejde for CPG?</p> <p>Hvad motiverer dig i dit job?</p> <p>Kan du forsøge at beskrive, hvordan du oplever kulturen i virksomheden?</p>
Overvejelserne bag beslutningen om at lægge HR og Kommunikation sammen.	<p>Hvornår begyndte du at overveje, at de to afdelinger skulle lægges sammen? (Direktør)</p> <p>Vil du forsøge at beskrive, så detaljeret som muligt, hvorfor du overvejede at sammenlægge de to afdelinger? (Direktør)</p> <p>Vil du forsøge at beskrive første gang du hørte om, at I skulle sammenlægge de to afdelinger? (medarbejder)</p> <p>Var du på nogen måde med til at påvirke beslutningen om, at afdelingerne skulle lægges sammen? (medarbejder)</p> <p>Kan du fortælle lidt om:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) hvad det indebar at træffe beslutningen om, at afdelingerne skulle lægges sammen? b) hvad du følte, da du hørte afdelingerne skulle lægges sammen? <p>Hvor mange ressourcer var der sat af til implementeringen af sammenlægningen? (Direktør)</p>

<p>Den faktiske ændring i organisationen - to afdelinger bliver til én.</p>	<p>Kan du forsøge at beskrive den proces I gennemgik, da I ændrede strukturen i organisationen?</p> <p>Kan du beskrive, hvad det betød for jeres organisationsstruktur, at de to afdelinger blev lagt sammen?</p> <p>Hvordan synes du, at beslutningen blev modtaget i organisationen?</p> <p>Er der nogen ting, som fungerede særligt godt i den gamle struktur, som I derfor har valgt at føre videre under den nye struktur?</p> <p>Oplever du nogen væsentlige forskelle fra før til nu?</p> <p>Er der blevet lavet justeringer i afdelingens struktur og arbejdsopgaver siden de to afdelinger blev lagt sammen?</p> <p>Hvis du får en god ide til, hvordan man kan gøre tingene anderledes, føler du så, at du bliver lyttet til?</p>
<p>De daglige arbejdsprocesser - mødet mellem HR og Kommunikation.</p>	<p>Har din rolle i virksomheden ændret sig efter sammenlægningen?</p> <p>Kan du forsøge, så detaljeret som muligt at beskrive, hvordan du oplever sammenlægningen i dit daglige arbejde?</p> <p>Arbejder du mere sammen med dine kollegaer i HR/Kommunikation end du gjorde under den gamle struktur?</p> <p>Kan du give et par konkrete eksempler på, hvor du har arbejdet sammen med en eller flere fra HR/Kommunikation?</p> <p>Føler du, at du har lært noget af dine kollegaer fra HR/Kommunikation?</p> <p>Kan du huske en situation, hvor du har bidraget med relevant</p>

	<p>viden til dine kollegaer i HR/Kommunikation?</p> <p>Føler du, at det er blevet naturligt for dig at arbejde sammen med dine kollegaer fra HR/Kommunikation?</p>
<p>Betydningen af samarbejdet mellem HR og Kommunikation.</p>	<p>Er der nogen arbejdsområder, hvor du mener samarbejdet giver værdi?</p> <p>Føler du, at der er nogen udfordringer ved sammenlægningen?</p> <p>Oplever du, at der bliver stillet større krav til, at afdelingen skal skabe værdi?</p> <p>Føler du, at I er blevet bedre til at udvikle ledere og medarbejdere i organisationen?</p> <p>Synes du, at sammenlægningen gør en forskel i forhold til at håndtere forandringer i organisationen?</p>
<p>Afslutning</p>	<p>Inden vi afrunder samtalen, har du så andre kommentarer eller spørgsmål?</p> <p>Er der nogen andre, som du mener det kunne være relevant for os at snakke med?</p>

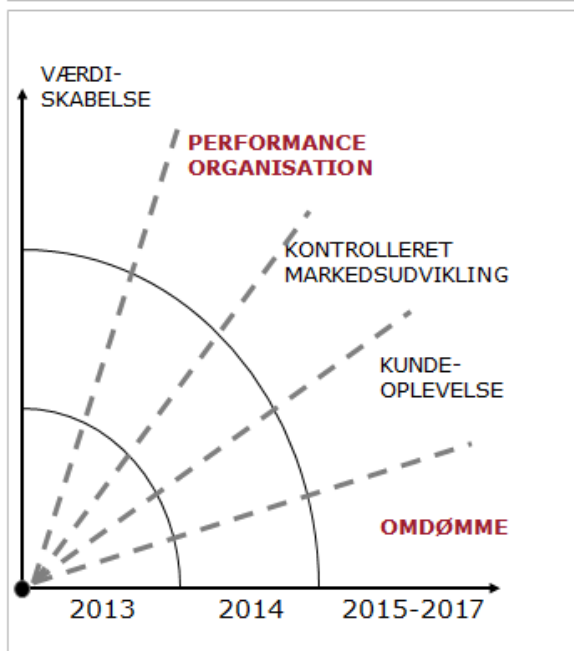
DEBRIEFING

Endnu engang tusind tak for dine kommentarer, vi værdsætter at du har afsat tid til at snakke med os. Hvis du på et senere tidspunkt har nogle spørgsmål eller uddybende kommentarer, er du naturligvis velkommen til at kontakte os. Til sidst vil vi gerne bede dig om ikke at tale med dine kollegaer om spørgsmålene før vi også har snakket med dem - dette er for at undgå, at de ikke bliver påvirket i en bestemt retning på forhånd.

Appendix 2

CPG's transformation strategy.

Transformationsmodellen 2013 - 2017



Værdiskabelse

Effektive processer og stordriftsfordele der muliggør branchens højeste afkast og konkurrencedygtige omkostninger

Performance organisation

Effektiv ledelse og organisering der understøtter eksekvering af strategiske mål, værdiskabelse og kommercielle resultater

Kontrolleret markedsudvikling

Styrkelse af stordriftsfordele via kundefastholdelse og lønsom kontrolleret vækst indenfor opsparing og nedsparing

Kundeoplevelse

Alle kunder får en kundeoplevelse, der matcher eller overgår deres forventninger

Omdømme

Stærkt, entydigt og troværdigt omdømme, der klart differentierer PFA i forhold til konkurrenterne og samtidig skaber tryghed

Appendix 3

From a CPG presentation on “effective support functions”.

STØTTEFUNKTIONER SKAL SPILLE BEDRE SAMMEN

- HR- og kommunikationsfunktionen skal spille bedre sammen for at møde øgede krav til begge discipliner
- HR skal få det fulde udbytte af stærk kontakt til linieledere
- HR skal supplere sit stærke fokus på processer og integrere kommunikationsdimensioner i den løbende organisationsudvikling i samspil med linieledelsen – få en bedre eksekvering



LEDERE SKAL SKABE MENING, MOTIVATION OG ENGAGEMENT

- Kommunikation skal fokusere på at udvikle både organisationen og medarbejderne i samarbejde med linieledere snarere end blot at rundsende information
- Kommunikation skal tænke mere i proces
- Kommunikation skal få det fulde udbyttet af tæt kontakt til topledelse – arbejde strategisk
- HR- og kommunikationsfaget mødes altså i dét vejkryds, der hedder organisationsudvikling med særlig fokus på ledere og ledelse



Appendix 4

Example of an article where the Director of CCLD has expressed his opinions externally.

DR gør det, Coloplast gør det, KMD gør det, [CPG] gør det: Lægger HR- og kommunikationsafdelingen sammen. Men hvad er pointen, og hvordan oplever de forandringen? Vi har spurgt [John], direktør i [CPG]. I december 2008 samlede de HR, kommunikation, presse, public affairs og CSR i én afdeling.

1. Hvad er rationalet bag beslutningen om at lægge HR og kommunikation sammen?

For os var der to formål med sammenlægningen, der egentlig går hånd i hånd: Der var dels et effektiviseringsformål, som enhver leder har pligt til at forholde sig til: Kan vi udføre vores opgaver med færre ressourcer? Og dels var der en aktuel forretningsmæssig udfordring i at udvikle organisationen og lederne i [CPG]. Den vigtigste kunde er jo strategien; det er den, man bør organisere sig efter. Derfor måtte vi se på, hvordan vi kunne bringe vores kompetencer i spil på en bedre måde. Og HR og kommunikation er to discipliner, der mødes netop, når det handler om at udvikle organisationen og gøre lederen bedre. Kommunikation kan sætte ord på strategien og benytte de rette medier, mens HR har processerne, der har med kulturen og adfærden at gøre.

2. Hvilke fordele oplever du i praksis?

I december 2008 var vi 38 personer i kommunikation og HR hver for sig. I dag er vi 29, der arbejder med et fælles fokus. Det interessante er ikke det antal stillinger, der spares, men at det er lykkedes at koble de to funktioner tættere på udfordringerne i forretningen. Jeg oplever, at vi i dag støtter op om ledelsens opgaver mere direkte. Du skal ikke lave ledelsens opgaver. Du skal gøre lederen god til lede. Det har vi nu værktøjerne til, og vi undgår overlap og en unødvendig kompleksitet i organisationen.

3. Er der nogen ulemper forbundet med sammenlægningen?

Nej, det synes jeg egentlig ikke. Men det er vigtigt at forstå, at den ideelle organisation ikke findes. Sammenlægning er et godt svar på aktuelle udfordringer hos os, og de kan se anderledes ud på et senere tidspunkt eller for andre typer virksomheder.

4. Hvad har overrasket dig mest undervejs?

Vi havde jo ikke en masterplan, der rakte langt frem, så vi har måttet lære undervejs, og efter to et halvt år er vi ved at finde hinanden. Men det har overrasket mig, i hvor høj grad både HR- og kommunikationsfolk søger bekræftelse inden for sin egen faglighed. Man har fx kunne se det, når vi har haft tilfredshedsmålinger, hvor medarbejderne hhv. har sagt 'Vi skal sætte HR på dagsordenen' og 'Vi skal sætter kommunikation på dagsordenen.' Nej. Vi skal sætte [CPG]'s strategi på dagsordenen! Faget i sig selv er ikke omdrejningspunktet. Der har vi hængt lidt i siloerne.

5. Hvad er dit råd til andre virksomheder, der går med tanker om en sammenlægning?

Som sagt findes den ideelle organisation ikke, så jeg vil ikke gøre mig for klog på, hvad andre skal gøre og ikke gøre. Men en fællesnævner må være, at man i afdelingerne jævnligt laver et sanity check og spørger sig selv: Hvad er det for nogle forretningsmæssige mål, vi har? Hvor støtter vi op om de mål? Og kan vi gøre tingene på en smartere måde? Alle funktioner – og selvfølgelig også kommunikation – må rette ind efter strategien.