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Intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain: Insights in dilemmas from practice

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Abstract

The diversity of responsibilities and interests that HR-professionals deal with, and the expectations they are required to live up to, bring tensions to their job and are likely to result in intra-role conflicts. In these conflicts, job responsibilities and expectations contradict or collide with other each other, with other required role behavior or with personal values. Intra-role conflicts can lead to negative feelings like stress and anxiety, and limit HR-professionals in effectively executing their job. These consequences stress the importance to tackle and prevent intra-role conflicts, for which more insight into what the conflicts constitute was necessary first. Through qualitative analysis of 24 intra-role conflicts of 13 HR-professionals, this study gained unique insights into dilemmas from practice and distinguished four types of expectations that constituted the intra-role conflicts. The authentic cases of intra-role conflict experienced by a varied group of HR-professionals give a deeper understanding of what challenges HR-professionals face, their complex position and the uniqueness of each intra-role conflict. These valuable findings can be used to prepare (future) HR-professional to a greater extent, with improved training and education based on dilemmas from practice. To do so more accurately, further analysis of personal aspects and job aspects that influence intra-role conflicts would be an interesting line of future research.

Key words: role conflict, intra-role conflict, Human Resources, HR roles, expectations

Intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain: Insights in dilemmas from practice

As a professional in human resources (HR), your job holds responsibilities towards employees of the organization as well as their managers and the employer. As you can imagine, different stakeholders whose interests are not always easy to combine. This challenging position of HR contributes to tensions that HR-professionals encounter in their job and are likely to lead to intra-role conflicts (Brown, Metz, Cregan, & Kulik, 2009; Sheehan, De Cieri, Greenwood & Van Buren III, 2014). This study aims to gain insight in the nature of these intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain, something that has not been studied before but it crucial to ultimately limit or prevent intra-role conflicts. Before diving into the empirical part of this study, HR-responsibilities, HR-roles and role conflicts are discussed. Authentic cases of intra-role conflict are then used to identify what constitutes intra-role conflicts for HR-professionals in practice. A deeper understanding of conflicting sides to current HR-roles can help define what is required of HR-professionals to deal with intra-role conflicts effectively. These are valuable insights for training of current HR-professionals and vocational and academic education of future HR-practitioners, in order to prepare them for the challenges they will face in practice. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to limiting intra-role conflicts and their negative consequences, and to improving the job performance of HR-professionals.

Theoretical framework

The multifaceted practice of HR

HR refers to the occupation, department or domain that aims to “add value through effectively managing and rationalizing the employment relationship” (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015, p. 188) and that is concerned with different “HR practices in people (hiring, training, career management), compensation or rewards, communication, and organization” (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015, p. 190). Over the last decade, the strategic influence of HR has increased and HR-practices are more often aligned with business strategies (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Simultaneously, there is an ongoing debate about the added value of the domain. Information technology and consultancy can partly outsource HR-practices and it is questioned how HR-professionals can maintain their own professional legitimacy (Caldwell, 2003; Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, & Shea, 2016). With a continuing change in organizational structures, the essence of HR seems to be dynamic and ambiguous rather than clearly defined (Caldwell, 2003; Sheehan et al., 2016; Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008).

As becomes evident from Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015), the HR-domain concerns a broad range of responsibilities related to employment in organizations. This has resulted in a subdivision of domains of expertise, like recruitment, reintegration and payroll. However, many jobs in HR are multifaceted and relate to more than one domain of expertise. Caldwell (2003) showcased the inadequacy of typologies that categorize HR-roles, in roles that focus on either administrative processes, change management, employees' interests, or strategic tasks (Storey, 1992; Ulrich, 1997). The majority of the 98 participating HR-professionals could not select one of the four roles as their main role in practice, because their own job overlapped with different roles. This confirmed the variety in their responsibilities and the complexity to label this. In additional interviews, cases of role ambiguity were pointed out in which HR-professionals were not sure how to describe their role at all.

Solnet, Kralje and Baum (2015) attempted to include all HR-responsibilities on a continuum from strategic to operational, as shown in Figure 1. This broad range of responsibilities forms different HR-roles in practice, which are not only multifaceted within themselves but also vary between organizations. Since organizations differ in their structure and the strategic expectations from HR-professionals (Lawler, 2011), the set of responsibilities of each HR-professional varies as well.

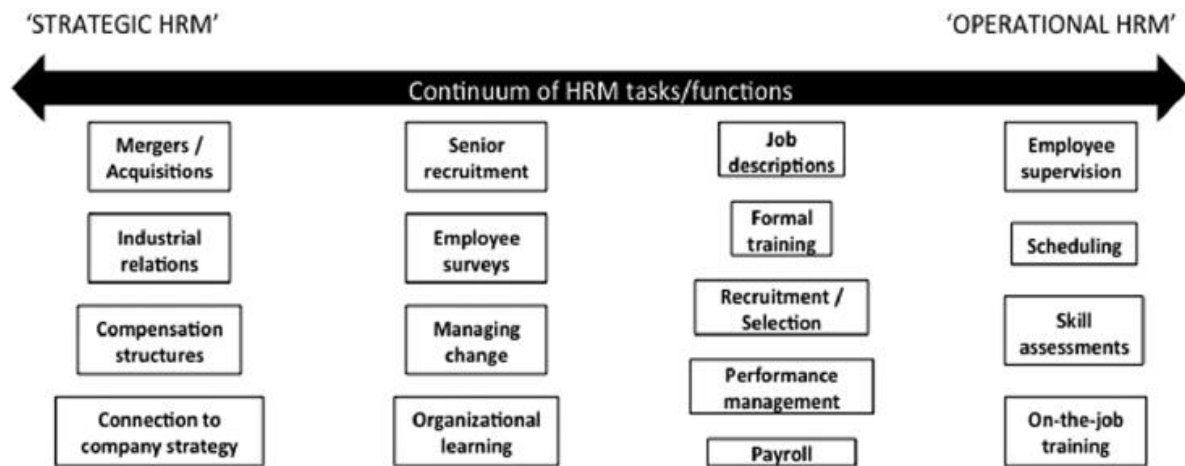


Figure 1. Human Resource Activities, From Strategic to Operational (Solnet, Kralj, & Baum, 2015).

Considering the fact that more multifaceted roles are expected to occur (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015), it is valuable to acknowledge that role variety, complexity and ambiguity are intrinsic characteristics of the HR-domain (Caldwell, 2003; Buckley & Monks, 2004). These characteristics foster challenges and role tensions that HR-professionals experience (Brown et al., 2009) and may eventually result in role conflicts (Sheehan et al., 2014).

Conceptualization of role conflict

Role conflict refers to a situation in which expectations or responsibilities of one or multiple roles contradict with each other (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzmann, 1970) or even contain mutually exclusive activities (Rahim, 2011). This causes role stress and can hinder effective job performance (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Schaufeli, Bakker, Van der Heijden, & Prins, 2009; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). In his extensive work on conflict in organizations, Rahim (2011) discussed the varying definitions of a role: the attitudes attributed by society to a certain position, someone's own conceptualization of his or her position, or someone's actual behavior. A distinction can be made between intra-role and inter-role conflicts, depending on whether the conflict occurs within one (intra) role or between different (inter) roles (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoak, & Rosenthal, 1964; Rahim, 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970). This study focuses on intra-role conflicts, which relate to conflict within one role only. In this, a role refers to someone's unique

job as HR-professional and his or her experience of that. In gaining insight into personal experiences of intra-role conflict, it is more important to include how HR-professionals perceive their own role opposed to measuring actual behavior.

In line with the conceptualization of role conflict (Rahim, 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970), intra-role conflict occurs because of (1) contradicting or incompatible role demands or (2) expectations, or because (3) required role behavior conflicts with personal values (Mohr & Puck, 2006; Rahim, 2011; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). A review of literature on intra-role conflict indicates that these three can be identified as sources of intra-role conflict. Shaufeli et al. (2009) illustrated intra-role conflict in their study on junior doctors, who are required to treat patients but also learn from their experience by asking questions and studying cases, which may result in less time and energy to put in patients. This does not mean their job demands are mutually exclusive, but due to the combination in one role, both job demands are executed less effectively and interfere with each other. Furthermore, Shaufeli et al. (2009) pointed out that studies on intra-role conflict are scarce, which is still the case ten years later.

Intra-role conflicts that relate to personal values are also referred to as *person-role conflicts*, if “the expectations associated with one of the individual’s roles are incompatible with the person’s own needs, aspirations, and/or values” (Mohr & Puck, 2006, p. 27). Other sources of intra-role conflict, namely contradicting role demands or expectations, can arise from something formal like a job description, but also from the social system around you (Welch & Welch, 2012). If people in that social system send out different expectations that are incompatible, this is also referred to as *inter-sender conflict* (Kahn et al., 1964; Mohr & Puck, 2006; Rahim, 2011). Since both *person-role* and *inter-sender conflict* occur within one role, they are both forms of intra-role conflict.

Role conflict in HR

The change of HR-roles towards a broader range of responsibilities and a more strategic nature, influences what HR-professionals' role demands, expectations and required role behaviors look like. Solnet et al. (2015) identified some characteristics that make it more likely to experience intra-role conflict, for instance professionals in a position between their supervisor and team members (foremen). This position also applies to HR-professionals, who are often expected to "both represent employee needs and implement management agendas" (Ulrich, 1997, p. 45). The variety of responsibilities and stakeholders and its position between employees and the employer, indicate that HR-professionals are in risk of experiencing intra-role conflicts and make HR an interesting and accurate domain to study this phenomenon. Sheehan et al. (2014) illustrated the rise of the strategic position of HR with role tensions of HR-professionals, primarily in their responsibilities and the interpretation of their role by others. They suggested that these role tensions "create the potential for role conflict" (Sheehan et al., 2014, p. 119). Apart from tensions and potential sources of intra-role conflict, previous studies have not identified specific conflicts that HR-professionals experience and what these conflicts are formed by. For instance, if an intra-role conflict is triggered by expectations of colleagues, what these expectations are or why they form a conflict is still open to question. As Rahim (2011) described, role conflicts are mostly situational and must be identified first, in order to moderate them or deal with them in the future. Knowing more specifically what constitutes intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain is valuable information to prepare future HR-practitioners for the challenges they will face. Therefore, insight must be gained into specific intra-role conflicts that current HR-professionals experience in practice.

Intra-role conflicts can have serious consequences on how effectively HR-professionals execute their job. Several studies showed negative relations between role conflict and job satisfaction, and positive relations with anxiety and intentions to leave the job (Acker, 2004; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). More recently, it was suggested that

conflicting expectations of HR negatively influence the ability to balance responsibilities (Sheehan et al., 2014) and hamper confidence in professional and organizational identity (Miscenko & Day, 2016). Furthermore, different job demands in HR may be incoherent or even incompatible, like short-term service tasks that hinder the execution of strategic plans (Aldrich, Dietz, Clark, & Hamilton, 2015). Sheehan et al. (2016) displayed that unbalanced responsibilities can marginalize strategic decision-making and credibility; environments with strong role conflict diminished HR's strategic power and role tensions could not be managed well. These negative effects stress the importance of tackling and preventing intra-role conflicts in practice. However, only by first knowing what these conflicts in the HR-domain actually involve, ways to limit or prevent them can be developed.

Present study

Taking into account the changing practice and the broad set of responsibilities of HR, it is expected that HR-professionals are likely to experience intra-role conflict in their job. Literature pointed out that role conflicts have to be identified first in order to moderate them later on (Rahim, 2011). This, apart from identifying role tensions due to strategic responsibilities (Brown et al., 2009; Sheehan et al., 2014) has not yet been done for the HR-domain. Although sources of intra-role conflict have been distinguished on an abstract level, actual insight in the context that these conflicts occur in lacks. Negative consequences of role conflict provide more than enough urgency to identify current challenges in the field, in order to tackle them in the future. This leads to the following research question: *What constitutes intra-role conflicts that HR-professionals experience in practice?*

Insights following from this study will provide a deeper understanding of intra-role conflicts that occur in current HR-practice. This contributes to a clearer image of challenges that future HR-practitioners have to be prepared for. Hereby, ways to cope with intra-role conflicts can be outlined and training and education in HR can be improved. Eventually this

study will help to limit the negative consequences of role conflict, like job dissatisfaction and a loss of strategic influence of HR.

Method

Design

The design of this study aimed for a deeper understanding of intra-role conflicts that occur in the HR-domain and with that, an elaborate insight in personal experiences. To reach this level of understanding, a qualitative method was used with semi-structured interviews that focused on authentic cases of intra-role conflict experienced by participants themselves.

Participants

Participants included thirteen Dutch speaking HR-professionals, including two men and eleven women ranging in age from 23 to 56 ($M = 39$, $SD = 11,28$). At the time of data collection, participants worked at eleven organizations varying from commercial sectors like the FMCG-industry, production industries, retail and private services to non-profit organizations and public authorities. Function titles included HR-director, HR business partner, HR-manager and HR-advisor, but the actual job demands within these roles varied for each title. Because of this, function titles were not used to distinguish between participants. All participants were educated at higher education (HBO) or university level (WO), had at least one year of working experience in HR and were employed at their current organization for at least three months.

Participants were purposely selected (Creswell, 2014) in order to represent the phenomenon as well as possible, sharing characteristics that were expected to contribute to intra-role conflicts. This resulted in a selection of multifaceted HR-roles (Buckley & Monks, 2004; Caldwell, 2003), participants with responsibilities towards both employees and the employer (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015) and participants without one HR-specialization, which may limit intra-role conflicts (Sheehan et al., 2016). This purposeful selection enhanced the transferability of results (Anney, 2014). A stratified selection aimed for a representation of a

variety of HR-roles, resulting in participants in junior to senior positions, male and female and in different geographic locations across The Netherlands.

Four participants were direct contacts from the researcher's social network. The fact that these were acquaintances led to more trust between them and the researcher which may have advantaged their honesty, but may have also limited them in talking about an organization that the researcher was already familiar with. To avoid further bias, for instance in age or geographic location, other participants were selected through snowballing (Byrne, 2001) in acquaintances' professional networks. In this selection, the characteristics of purposeful sampling (participants with multifaceted HR-roles, responsibilities towards both employees and the employer and without one HR-specialization) were still taken into account. This resulted in nine participants the researcher was unfamiliar with beforehand.

Instruments

Written cases of participants. To study intra-role conflicts that participants encountered, cases from their personal experience were used. Participants were requested to write down and send in situations from the last three months in their current job, in which they faced a dilemma, struggled to handle a situation well, or dealt with contradicting demands or expectations. The request to describe these situations was attached to the information letter and can be found in Appendix A. This method gave participants time to think about relevant experiences beforehand, so they were not caught off guard when directly asked about intra-role conflicts. In the request, no strict definition or examples of intra-role conflicts were included. This prevented participants from being pushed in a certain direction but also led to cases that could not be characterized as intra-role conflicts. To tackle this, the researcher selected situations for each participant framed as intra-role conflicts based on literature. Each participant described at least one suitable intra-role conflict and could therefore proceed with the study. The written input was not used as data but formed valuable input for the interviews.

In the first pilot of this instrument, an HR-professional gave a description of seven situations of which two fitted with the concept of intra-role conflict. In order to capture more than two suitable intra-role conflicts for each participant, a more narrow description of the kind of situations to think of was given. A number of situations (two to eight) and a time span of one month were added. In the second pilot, another HR-professional gave feedback that one month was too short to think of enough situations, which was changed to three months.

Interviews. The interviews focused on one or more of participants' intra-role conflicts, depending on the time available. The semi-structured interviews consisted of a standardized introduction and closing, and around 20 initial questions (Appendix B). The topics of the interview were the (1) situation itself and three sources of intra-role conflicts as identified by literature, namely (2) job demands, (3) expectations and (4) personal values and feelings that were part of the conflict. The interviews aimed for a complete understanding of the intra-role conflicts, and for each topic asked about any conflicting aspects of the situation, for instance: *'To what extent do you think the different interests could go hand in hand?'* (Question 3.6). Before the first interviews, the questions were tested and adjusted. The sequence of the questions was changed after the first interview and the question *'What did you learn from this situation looking back?'* (Question 4.5) was added.

Since intra-role conflicts are open to interpretation, interviews were the most suitable measure to gain insight in participants' experiences, perspectives and feelings (Creswell, 2014). Semi-structured interviews gave the opportunity to reflect on these experiences and pose questions that went beyond initial answers. The content validity of the interviews (Brod, Tesler, & Christiansen, 2009) was assured with the pre-selection of relevant cases of intra-role conflict. The fact that the questions were based on a theoretical framework also supported their content validity (Brod et al., 2009). The personal reflection of participants fostered the credibility of the data but limited the ability to generalize results (Creswell, 2014).

Procedure

Potential participants were approached via personal requests on LinkedIn or text messages. When interested, they received the information letter (YoDa) about the context of the study and the requested efforts of participants, namely the written cases and a face-to-face audiotaped interview. The request to describe cases (Appendix A) was attached to the information letter. When agreed to participate, an interview appointment was made. The interview could only proceed if the cases were submitted timely and if participants signed the Informed Consent (Appendix C). All interviews took place at the workplace of participants and started with checking whether participants were okay to discuss the pre-selected intra-role conflicts. The interviews varied between 30 and 70 minutes, depending on the amount of conflicts discussed.

After thirteen interviews, a wide variety of intra-role conflicts was discussed which, despite their different contexts, showed strong commonalities. Additional interviews may have added unique situations but due to time limitations, the variety in these thirteen intra-role conflicts was found satisfactory as a basis for this study. As Miles and Huberman (1984) stated, it is believed that “full determination and closure on explanations is not possible, but that some explanations are more powerful, more fully saturated, than others” (p. 23).

Data analysis

The data included interviews about individual accounts of intra-role conflict, which were used to gain in-depth insight in unique contexts but also to identify what generally constitutes intra-role conflicts in HR. The intra-role conflicts functioned as descriptive cases in order to understand their context and complexity on within-case level (Yin, 2003). Additionally, similar to multi-case studies, the intra-role conflicts had the instrumental use to go beyond their unique character and find commonalities across cases (Stake, 1994; 2013). Ayres, Kavanaugh and Knafl (2003) compared within-case and cross-case analyses and stated that the paradoxical

goal of these approaches is that “readers can recognize individual experience in a generalizable way” (p. 873). According to them, this can only be achieved if within- and cross-case strategies are combined and when interpretative choices are made based on research purposes.

Within-case analysis. First, the audiotapes of the interviews were manually processed into literal transcripts (YoDa) and like the start of many analyses (Ayres et al., 2003; Tolson, Fleming, & Schartau, 2002; Yin, 2003), the transcripts were read carefully one by one. The 13 interviews included 26 cases, of which after reading 24 were identified as intra-role conflict and taken on for further analysis. In both excluded cases, no actual sign of conflict or contradiction with regard to the HR-professional’s own role could be identified. Subsequently, the transcripts were read again while highlighting phrases that seemed relevant to capture the core of the conflict. This was used to create an overview of all separate intra-role conflicts (YoDa). This overview included a description of the conflict by the participant him-/herself, significant quotes that indicated the presence of an intra-role conflict, the researcher’s summary of the conflict and additional notes to clarify interpretation or context. The summary captured the conflict itself, consequences and feelings related to the conflict and if applicable, other striking characteristics. All text used to create the summaries was marked with notes in the transcripts. The overview of all cases provided in-depth insight in the unique context of each intra-role conflict.

Cross-case analysis. For cross-case analysis, the summaries were used as comparable descriptions of the conflicts and significant quotes were used to identify a common style of expression (Kavanaugh, 1997; Tolson et al., 2002). The sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2003), namely the sources of intra-role conflict from previous literature, were used to identify the job demands, expectations and personal values that collided with each other in the intra-role conflicts. With that, the conflicts were compared on a more abstract level and commonalities between the conflicts were found. This led to an identification of the core of each intra-role

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

conflict, resulting in four categories of expectations that constituted the intra-role conflicts. Cross-case analysis continued with a comparison on several variables like job demands, feelings and the influence of the conflict on the HR-professional's job. An example of this last analysis can be found in Table 1.

Table 1.

Example of cross-case analysis matrix.

Case	Job demand(s) related to conflict	Feeling related to conflict	Situation unique?	Consequence on job execution of HR-professional
4A	Re-integration trajectory	Doubting	Yes, likewise	Doubting own decisions
	Collaborate with external parties	Insecure	experiences were less complex	Checking with manager More time and effort to solve issues and finish trajectory

Throughout all steps of cross-examination, transcripts were consulted when the summaries did not provide sufficient information. Lines from the transcripts that were used to make decisions were added to the summaries. Throughout data analysis, the intra-role conflicts were described with numbers and letters, 5B for instance referring to the second conflict of the fifth participant in sequence of the interviews. When conflicts were described more elaborately in the results section, this was changed into pseudonyms.

Credibility. To limit the researcher's bias in interpreting the transcripts, member checks were included. All participants received the transcript of their interview so that they were able to make any objections or suggestions, which ensured the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If their intra-role conflicts were described elaborately in the results, this was also checked with them. All participants agreed with the transcriptions and interpretations, apart from the request to omit personal information like function titles and departments for privacy

reasons. The latter indicated the sensitivity of the conflicts and the shared trust between the researcher and participants.

Dependability. Creswell and Miller (2000) described executing an audit trail as a way to determine and strengthen the trustworthiness of the process and results. The external auditor, a peer researcher, used a process document (YoDa) to trace back decisions made by the researcher and to check if conclusions could be linked to two single intra-role conflicts. The process document included an extensive description of data collection and analysis, and all documentation used for data analysis. Suggestions from the auditor clarified steps in data analysis and verified the results and conclusions, which contributed to the dependability of this study (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

In all 24 intra-role conflicts, expectations were a key part of the conflict. Commonalities were found in the expectations that formed the cores of the conflicts. This resulted in four types of expectations that constituted the intra-role conflicts of the HR-professionals in this study. These categories were shortened as the ‘core conflicts’, representing all 24 intra-role conflicts, and were as follows:

1. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what he/she wants to do or personally values;
2. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with other expectations of the HR-professional;
3. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what he/she is able to do in his/her role;
4. Expectations of the HR-professional are unclear or undefined.

Not all 24 intra-role conflicts could be categorized as only one of these core conflicts; three of them related to more than one core conflict. For example, one of the intra-role conflicts

revolved around expectations that the HR-professional did not agree with, combined with expectations of other stakeholders that the HR-professional was not able to live up to, and therefore belonged to 1 and 3. The other 21 intra-role conflicts belonged to only one of the core conflicts. The expectations were those of the HR-professional him-/herself (from now on referred to as ‘her’) and/or those of the social system around her, and varied from implicit to more explicit expectations.

In the next section, each core conflict is explained and illustrated with an example of an intra-role conflict from one of the participants. Since each conflict is unique on its own, the examples do not represent the whole core conflict. The examples are discussed based on their context, the tasks and people the HR-professional dealt with, personal feelings and its influence on their job. After this, an overview of the core conflicts follows in Table 2.

1. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she wants to do or personally values.

The majority of the intra-role conflicts from this study, namely 11 out of 24, involved expectations from others that conflicted with what the HR-professional personally wanted to do or valued most. This meant that the HR-professional was either expected to execute tasks that she wanted to do in a different way, did not feel like the right thing to do, or that she was expected to do nothing whilst wanting to do something. Most HR-professionals indicated this very clearly: “Well, personally I find that, I see that as a dilemma as I do not want to take that on.” (Laura, HR-advisor). These intra-role conflicts generally led to feelings of frustration, stress or insecurity. When conflicts touched upon personal values, they were clearly more emotionally charged than other conflicts: “When you have said ten times over that you find this very important and then it does not happen, yeah you know, yeah you just lose your credibility!” (Helen, HR-manager). In the vast majority of the conflicts in this category, the expectations came from the HR-professional’s manager or employer.

The latter was also the case for Kirsten (conflict 10A), HR-manager at a large industrial company, who was requested by the trade union and her managing director to develop and implement a certain appraisal system. From the start, Kirsten was convinced that the appraisal system as proposed was outdated and would not contribute to the development of the employees. She was afraid to express this and because she did not know what else to do, postponed her tasks. “[...] it did bother me that, and I experienced some stress of this, yeah I wanted to achieve something and had an ideal, and uhm, and I just did not know the solution at that moment.” Her director got impatient and raised the pressure, up to a point where Kirsten admitted that she did not believe in the effectiveness of the appraisal system. He showed little understanding and Kirsten felt bad about not being able to live up to her job demands and promises, but also did not want to let go of her ideals: “[...] and I am usually very yeah, uh, I am very trustworthy when it comes to this, when I promise something I always do it, but in this case I did not.”

Ultimately, Kirsten was able to develop an alternative appraisal system, which she got her director to believe in as well. When looking back, Kirsten indicated that she should have come clean earlier on: “I should have involved him in this. And then he would have, uh, would have understood it better. [...] and uh in the beginning my strategy was to do nothing, do nothing, and looking back that was not that wise.” In seven other conflicts, HR-professionals also indicated that they should have set clearer expectations and discuss their perspective with other stakeholders upfront, or that they aim to do so in the future. Despite finding an appropriate solution, Kirsten experienced this conflict as a stressful time which hampered how well she could execute her job. Less effective job performance was reflected in many of the other intra-role conflicts, which led to stress, doubts and/or more time to take decisions.

2. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with other expectations of the HR-professional.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

The 7 out of 24 intra-role conflicts revolving around contradicting expectations generally had to do with different interests of stakeholders or job responsibilities that simply could not be combined at the same time. This meant that the HR-professionals often had to choose between interests of external parties, the employer, colleagues, employees and/or her own interests. Because multiple expectations excluded each other or collided, the HR-professionals could not live up to all expectations involved.

This was also the case for Mieke (conflict 3A), who operates locally as HR business partner at a production site, but is also part of the organization's central HR-team on a national level. It just so happened that two important meetings of both the local site and the central HR-team were held simultaneously, which meant that Mieke had to choose where to be present. On both sides, colleagues expected her to be there and contribute to the meetings. Her choice on where to be seemed obvious to her, which meant choosing for what she felt most responsible for. Despite that, Mieke struggled with her commitment towards both responsibilities: "[...] having the feeling of you know, you are not able to contribute to that, so it seems like you are not completely dedicated to that". She described her struggle as a feeling of falling short. Mieke also pointed out that this kind of contradicting responsibilities are a common issue in her job: "Yeah, that is a difficult combination because you realize that the main interests of an HR-team - which is not as closely involved in the day-to-day things - are different and that they expect something else from you than they expect from you locally." As nine other HR-professionals indicated as well, the type of dilemma she experienced was not unique for her role.

Mieke did not express much doubt surrounding her decision, which may be because she had her priorities straight or because the incident concerned mutually exclusive responsibilities. Therefore, it was obvious that she had to choose between two options. In other intra-role conflicts, choices were more ambiguous or more dependent on how the HR-professional

handled the situation. This sometimes led to doubts or insecurities but also meant that compromises could be made.

3. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she is able to do in her role.

Six intra-role conflicts revolved around expectations that the HR-professional was not able to live up to. This was not due to a difficult combination of expectations, as was the case in the second core conflict, but due to complex or unrealistic expectations on themselves. In three out of six conflicts, the HR-professional's opinion or position made them unable to have an unbiased perspective or advise a certain stakeholder. In the other conflicts, the HR-professionals did not know how to execute their tasks or lacked the influence to actually do something. This showcased that the nature of 'not being able to' varied largely and formed different intra-role conflicts.

Joyce (conflict 2B) works as an HR-advisor at a retail organization and part of her role is to support store-managers in HR-related issues. A main source of dissatisfaction is the shortage of budget to employ people in the stores, and the amount of hours that employees work overtime to get everything done. Joyce shares their concerns and even expressed a fear of what will happen when things do not improve. However, in her role, all she is able to do is report signals to her manager. This has not led to any change, which not only frustrates her but also the store-managers, who keep expressing their difficulties and their expectation of Joyce to turn things around. For Joyce, this led to an even bigger struggle: "What I do find complex is that they share information I can't do anything about. And I think that's the case in this example, they express their frustrations and indicate that there's a limit where they cannot handle it any longer, which I find are very serious signals we should take action on, but we can't do anything about it." To handle the situation, Joyce tried to set clear expectations and told herself not to take it personally because then, she said, it would really affect her. Because the situation also

conflicted with what she personally wanted to do, this intra-role conflict also belonged to the first core conflict.

In Joyce's case, similar to other intra-role conflicts, employees had somewhat unrealistic expectations of what the HR-professional was able to do. Joyce really could not change anything about the situation, but other HR-professionals choose what they could do best in order to do their job well. For instance, in two conflicts, the HR-professional advised a manager about the underperformance of an employee, which made them unable to support and advise the employee in this as well. Even if this was what the employee requested: "But okay, at that moment I could not, yeah I did not act upon that really, as I just said, because I was primarily the advisor of that other person." (Jennifer, HR-advisor).

4. Expectations of HR-professional are unclear or undefined.

The least intra-role conflicts, namely four, constituted unclear or undefined expectations that formed some sort of dilemma. In all cases, this meant that the HR-professional was unsure about her own position and/or unsure how to act. In three out of four conflicts, HR-professionals questioned whether something was up to them and their role. For instance, Lesley (conflict 5B), HR-advisor at a large non-profit organization, was not sure whether to join the staff meetings she was invited to every other week. She expressed doubts about the added value of her presence, but had no clear indication from her job description, colleagues or manager that she should decline the meetings either. When asked if she thought it was her responsibility to be up to date about the operational issues discussed in the meetings, Lesley answered: "Yeah well that is the dilemma. Sometimes it is convenient, sometimes it is not. To what extent does this belong to my role? Yeah uhm, I do not know."

Kim's conflict (6B) also involved her being unsure about her actions, but was more multifaceted. In her role as HR-advisor, Kim supported an employee who decided to leave her job after going through some tough private circumstances. After the agreements for resignation,

Kim suddenly realized that the employee had missed out on a substantial compensation. Kim was convinced that the employee did not know the legislation and empathized with her: “[...] I do think I feel some kind of sentiment towards her because I also know that she did not choose for this situation”. If Kim would enable the compensation just in time, this would be additional costs for the employer. That would contradict with the clear expectation that her employer had from her, namely to foster the margin at all times. However, another clear expectation was that employees had to represent ‘the best’ employment practices. With that in mind, Kim felt like granting the compensation would result in a grateful former employee. Even though the organization had set clear expectations from Kim, they could not be combined in this particular situation and therefore, Kim experienced a dilemma. Her feelings towards the employee and her urge to be honest also played a part, as she stated: “But it is really the case that this weighs heavily on my conscience”.

Kim’s intra-role conflict was unique in a sense that it related to three of the four core conflicts; expectations conflicting with what she wanted to do (be honest instead of prioritize employer’s margin), expectations conflicting with each other (prioritize employer’s margin and be a good employer), and expectations that in this situation were unclear to her. Even with multiple expectations involved, she was unsure what to do, which illustrates the complexity of her intra-role conflict.

The four core conflicts and specific examples of intra-role conflicts showcased that each intra-role conflict was unique in its own setting. Table 2 gives an overview of the core conflicts, constituted by different types of expectations, illustrated with two summarized intra-role conflicts each. In Appendix D, a full overview of all intra-role conflicts experienced by participants in this study can be found.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

Table 2.

Expectations forming the core of the conflicts, the amount of intra-role conflicts and two examples of each category.

Core of the conflict	Intra-role conflicts in %	Example of intra-role conflict
1. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she wants to do or personally values.	11/24 = 45.8	HR-professional does not want to take over managers' HR-related tasks. HR-professional is expected to develop and implement an appraisal system she is personally against.
2. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with other expectations of the HR-professional.	7/24 = 29.2	HR-professional receives contradicting advice from external parties in reintegration trajectory. HR-professional is expected to treat information in conversations as confidential but also to develop policies based on issues that come up in these conversations.
3. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she is able to do in her role.	6/24 = 25	Employees expect that HR-professional solves budget issues, but is only able to signal the issues to her manager. HR-professional is expected to deliver an objective advice, but her opinion is influenced by previous work for an employee involved.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

4. Expectations of the HR-professional are unclear or undefined.

4/24 = 16.7

HR-professional is unsure whether she is in the right position to confront managing director with behavior.

HR-professional is unsure whether to attend staff meetings or not, and has nothing definite to base a certain decision on.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

Apart from what constitutes the intra-role conflicts, some other striking similarities were found. In 14 out of 24 conflicts, participants mentioned that the kind of conflict was not unique in their role or that they had experienced likewise tensions before, identifying intra-role conflicts as a characteristic of the HR-domain. Several participants indicated that dealing with interests of both employees and the employer is also a typical challenge in HR: “And uhm, I find myself in some sort of triangular relationship, which is not odd in an HR-related situation.” (Peter, HR-director). This was in the line with the debate on who HR represents: “What I do find, but that’s a bit of a general HR-thing, is that in my eyes HR is there for the organization and uhm, that means that you, uh, if you do it well you have to keep an eye on both interests.” (Angela, HR-advisor). Jennifer’s (HR-advisor) perspective corresponded with this: “No but that’s difficult sometimes, sometimes employees expect like, well, I’m talking to you now, you are my spokesperson and you represent me. And that of course is not the case. I represent employer and employee but I try to do what’s best for the whole organization, and that’s not always in line with personal interests, no.” This indicated that the complex position of HR in an organization was a relevant and sometimes difficult topic to multiple participants.

Discussion

Conclusion

This study aimed for a deeper understanding of what constitutes intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain. With 13 interviews and 24 authentic cases of intra-role conflict, this study provides an in-depth insight in the context and the occurrence of intra-role conflicts experienced by a varied group of HR-professionals. Apart from the uniqueness of these conflicts, four types of expectations that formed the intra-role conflicts were distinguished. The intra-role conflicts were constituted by (1) expectations that conflict with what the HR-professional wants to do or personally values, (2) expectations of the HR-professional that conflict with each other, (3)

expectations that conflict with what the HR-professional is able to do in her role, and/or (4) expectations that are unclear or undefined.

Based on the unique findings of this study, previously identified sources of intra-role conflict (Rahim, 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970) could be specified into the four cores of the intra-role conflicts that HR-professionals experienced. This confirmed the important share that expectations have in intra-role conflicts (Rahim, 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970). The fact that sources of intra-role conflict were originally described on a more abstract level can be explained by the absence of a specific profession the literature related to. This study also reflects different kinds of intra-role conflicts that were previously distinguished, namely the *inter-sender conflict* (Kahn et al., 1964; Mohr & Puck, 2006; Rahim, 2011), when people send out incompatible expectations, and the *person-value conflict* (Mohr & Puck, 2006), when required role behavior conflicts with what someone personally wants. These are similar to two types of expectations that constituted the conflicts this study (1 and 2), but not comprehensive of all conflicts experienced by participants.

The intra-role conflicts captured by this study display the challenges that HR-professionals face in practice and the complexity of their position. This study identifies what HR-professionals are required to deal with and have to be prepared for in training and education. By gaining insight in a large variety of intra-role conflicts, the necessity to tackle these conflicts has only become more evident. This study confirms negative consequences of role conflict, like a decrease in job satisfaction and less effective job performances (Acker, 2004; Stamper & Johlke, 2003), indicated with negative feelings like insecurities, stress and frustration. Statements about the complexity of the dilemmas indicate that the HR-professionals were seriously troubled by the conflicts they experienced. Not only do intra-role conflicts affect individual well-being, with a decreased job performance they can ultimately hamper the effectiveness of an HR-department and the organization itself. This provides enough incentive

to use findings from this study to prepare future HR-professionals more accurately on the challenges they may face in practice.

Finally, multiple characteristics of the HR-domain that were discussed in previous literature are confirmed by this study. Brown et al. (2009) identified ambiguity about who the HR-professional represents as a tension, which in several intra-role conflicts formed an issue as well. The broad range of responsibilities and the ambiguity in HR-roles that Caldwell (2003) showcased, correspond with the multifaceted jobs of HR-professionals in this study. For instance, participants described dealing with the interests of both the employer and employees, being unsure about their position and experiencing struggles in which responsibilities to prioritize. Furthermore, Sheehan et al. (2014) discussed tensions in HR-roles due to the strategic position of HR in organizations. They indicated that despite becoming more involved in strategic processes, real strategic power is still very limited and as a department, HR is not fully in control of the influence it has. This observation is in line with the lack of influence that a number of HR-professionals faced in their intra-role conflicts. Finally, Bower, Jerrim and Gask (2004) implied that wider role expectations form a potential for role conflict. This was reflected by the conflicts in which expectations from the HR-professionals went beyond what they were able to do.

Limitations and future research

While providing valuable insights, this study has some limitations. To start with, the impact of the intra-role conflict was discussed during interviews and in the results, even though not all conflicts were solved at the time of the interviews. In these cases, HR-professionals were not able to describe consequences or how they looked back at the conflict. This made it hard to compare them with conflicts in which this kind of information was available, limiting the conclusions that could be drawn. In future studies, this can be prevented by only asking

participants to describe dilemmas that, in their eyes, have passed. With that, a stronger focus can be placed on what HR-professionals learned from their experiences.

Furthermore, this study did not include any within- or across-person analysis. With only analyzing on case-level, a sense of (in)consistency between the intra-role conflicts that individual or multiple HR-professionals experienced could not be identified. This was done accordingly because case-level analysis was necessary first in order to establish if there were any commonalities between intra-role conflicts at all. If this would not have been the case, consistency between professionals was not likely either. Since commonalities were found in what the intra-role conflicts revolved around, within- and across-person analysis would have been a valuable addition. In line with the uniqueness of each intra-role conflict, Dierdorff and Morgeson (2007) pointed out that occupational context largely influences our expectations of appropriate role behavior. Since expectations formed a key part of each intra-role conflict, this suggests that characteristics like type of organization may influence the intra-role conflicts. If within- and across-person analysis are included in future studies, personal aspects or job aspects that foster or limit intra-role conflicts can be identified.

Finally, some methodological limitations are worth to mention. Due to the qualitative design, this study did not capture the amount of conflicts that occur in the HR-domain. Quantitative data could complement the results, for instance by showing how often HR-professionals experience intra-role conflicts. If it would be an aim to generalize results, the sample of HR-professionals should represent the domain to a greater extent. With 15% of male participants, male HR-professionals were underrepresented in this study compared to approximately 14% to 37% of male students starting in HR-education in The Netherlands each year (Studiekeuze123.nl, YoDa).

Theoretical and practical implications

Prior to this study, a limited amount of research on intra-role conflicts had been conducted (Shaufeli et al., 2009). The previously identified sources of intra-role conflict (Rahim, 2011; Rizzo et al., 1970) did indicate how intra-role conflicts occurred, but were somewhat abstract. This study addresses this knowledge gap and contributes to existing literature on intra-role conflict with a more detailed framework of the cores of intra-role conflicts in the HR-domain. With that, intra-role conflicts of HR-professionals can be understood on a deeper level. Knowing what constitutes intra-role conflicts in HR also contributes to our knowledge on role conflicts in general. Insights from this study may also hold meaning for other professions, or at least provide meaningful input for research along these lines.

According to role theory (Biddle, 1986), our expectations of a certain environment and what a role requires, shape how we enact our own role and construct roles of others. This implies that our own expectations are of great influence on our role behavior, including our perception of the expectations of others. Despite differences in role theories (Biddle, 1986), all agree that expectations are of major influence on how roles are shaped and executed. This line of research supports the outlined influence of expectations on intra-role conflict and by that, this study does not only provide a detailed framework itself but also contributes to prior research on the relation between expectations, roles and role conflict.

The occurrence of intra-role conflicts is evident, and with their negative consequences, the importance to deal with them as well. On a practical level, a next step is to use the findings to reflect upon required competences of HR-professionals to handle intra-role conflicts effectively. Subsequently, we need to identify how this can be applied to training and education of HR-professionals. As intra-role conflicts can now be seen as a typical characteristic of the HR-domain, it might be the responsibility of tertiary education to prepare its students well for this. For instance, if knowing how to respond to many or unrealistic expectations in a

professional way would help dealing with tensions, this is an important skill to include in courses. Apart from educational improvements, employers could be more attentive to intra-role conflicts and provide the necessary support. Since it is likely that multiple professionals are involved in one conflict, it is worth the effort to face confrontations, manage expectations and moderate negative consequences that intra-role conflicts can have on individuals and the organization.

As becomes evident from this study, HR-professionals face a variety of intra-role conflicts constituted by expectations from multiple stakeholders and themselves. As the debate about HR's added value and professional legitimacy (Caldwell, 2003; Sheehan et al., 2016) moves forward, it may be valuable to acknowledge that dealing with these expectations is not that easy and can be seen as a real expertise. If the HR-domain was to recognize intra-role conflicts as inevitable, knowing how to respond effectively and tackle intra-role conflicts could be a way for HR-professionals to excel.

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Appendices

Appendix A Request for written cases of intra-role conflict

Appendix B Interview questions

Appendix C Informed consent

Appendix D Overview of intra-role conflicts

Appendix E FETC-form (external document and in YoDa)

Appendix A: Request for written cases of intra-role conflict

1. Original request in Dutch

Beschrijving praktijksituaties

Beschrijf 2 tot 8 situaties die afgelopen drie maanden in jouw werk hebben plaatsgevonden, waarin je binnen jouw functie:

- niet goed of niet zeker wist hoe je op dat moment het beste kon handelen;
- niet aan verschillende taken of verwachtingen kon voldoen; en/of
- het gevoel had in een dilemma of spagaat te zitten.

De situaties kunnen aan één van deze kenmerken of aan meerdere kenmerken voldoen.

Beschrijf per situatie in één of een aantal korte zinnen wat de situaties was, welke personen/functies en welke werkzaamheden erbij betrokken waren.

Zoals je in de informatiebrief hebt kunnen lezen, worden jouw gegevens en antwoorden vertrouwelijk en anoniem verwerkt en alleen voor onderwijs- en onderzoeksdoeleinden gebruikt. Je hebt op ieder moment in dit onderzoek de mogelijkheid jouw antwoorden na te lezen en aan te passen. Dat geldt ook voor de beschreven situaties.

Je wordt vriendelijk verzocht de beschreven praktijksituaties uiterlijk drie dagen voorafgaand aan het interview te mailen aan s.j.dekker@students.uu.nl.

Hartelijk dank!

2. Translated request in English

Request to describe situations from practice

Describe 2 to 8 situations you encountered in the past three months of your job, in which you:

- did not know or was unsure how to act in that moment of time;
- was not able to execute (several) tasks or live up to expectations; and/or;
- felt like you experienced a dilemma.

The situations can meet one or more of these characteristics.

Describe for each situation in one or a few short sentences what the situation was, which people/function titles and which job tasks were involved.

As you read in the information letter, your personal data and answers will be treated as confidential and processed anonymously. They will only be used for education and research purposes. At any time during this study, you have the opportunity to look into your answers and modify them. This is also the case for the situations you are about to describe.

You are kindly requested to submit the described situations within three days before our interview, to s.j.dekker@students.uu.nl.

Thank you so much in advance.

Appendix B: Interview questions

- Sentences between [] concern information the interviewer has to add or think of during the interviews.
- Sub questions like 2.1.1 concern questions that only have to be asked when that information did not come up in the initial answer yet.

1. Original questions in Dutch

Opening [literally]

Ik ben Silke Dekker, student master Onderwijswetenschappen aan de Universiteit van Utrecht. Voor mijn scriptie onderzoek ik rolconflicten uit de HR praktijk, aan de hand van relevante literatuur, praktijkdilemma's en interviews. Om inzicht te krijgen in jouw ervaringen heb ik [aantal] situaties geselecteerd die jij voorafgaand aan dit gesprek hebt ingestuurd, waar dit interview over zal gaan. De situaties betreffen [input van participant voorlezen]. Dit gesprek zal ongeveer 60 minuten duren. Zoals je in de toestemmingsverklaring hebt gelezen wordt het gesprek opgenomen en achteraf letterlijk uitgetypt. Ik wil graag benadrukken dat je mij op ieder moment mag onderbreken, vragen mag stellen en het interview stop kan zetten zonder dat je daar een reden voor hoeft te geven. Daarnaast wordt er volledig vertrouwelijk met jouw gegevens en antwoorden omgegaan en wordt alles anoniem verwerkt. Ik wil je alvast hartelijk danken voor je tijd en inzet. Heb je ergens bezwaar tegen of heb je nog vragen?

- Ja → [Vragen beantwoorden].
- Nee → Dan gaan we nu met het interview beginnen en zal ik de opname starten.

1. Topic: The situation itself

De vragen die nu volgen zullen over de volgende situatie gaan: [Eén situatie letterlijk voorlezen]. Als de tijd het toelaat zal ik deze vragen ook stellen over de andere situatie(s).

1.1. Kan je kort omschrijven wat de aanleiding van de situatie was?

1.1.1. Wat vormde voor jou concreet het dilemma of het probleem?

1.1.2. Waarom was dit een probleem?

2. Topic: Job demands and responsibilities

[Inleiden dat de volgende vragen over werkzaamheden van de respondent gaan]

Subtopic: Job responsibilities

2.1. Welke van jouw werkzaamheden/taken waren hierbij betrokken?

2.2. Hoe vaak doe jij dit soort werkzaamheden?

2.2.1. Zijn dit voor jou operationele werkzaamheden of meer lange-termijn, strategische werkzaamheden? [Per werkzaamheid]

2.3. In hoeverre vind/denk je dat deze werkzaamheden tot jouw verantwoordelijkheid en functie behoren?

2.3.1. Waar baseer je dit op? [Denk aan aannames, gewoonte, functieomschrijving, directe vraag leidinggevende]

Subtopic: Conflicting job responsibilities

2.4. In hoeverre zou je (de combinatie van) de werkzaamheden als complex omschrijven?

2.4.1. [Wel] Wat is er complex aan? [Niet] Waarom niet?

2.5. In hoeverre ervoer je jouw taken binnen deze situatie als complex?

2.5.1. [Wel] Wat was er complex aan? [Niet] Waarom niet?

2.6. Wat heb je uiteindelijk concreet gedaan aan de situatie?

2.6.1. Waarom heb je daar uiteindelijk voor gekozen?

2.6.2. Van jouw werkzaamheden, in hoeverre heb je deze naar jouw idee voldoende of goed genoeg uitgevoerd?

2.6.3. Wat was het gevolg hiervan?

2.7. Heb je eerder soortgelijke situaties meegemaakt met betrekking tot deze taken?

2.7.1. [Ja] Kan je daar een voorbeeld van geven? [Nee] Wat maakte deze situatie uniek?

3. Topic: Expectations

[Inleiden dat de volgende vragen over personen betrokken bij de situatie gaan.]

Subtopic: The persons involved

3.1. Wie / welke functies waren er betrokken bij deze situatie?

[Denk aan directe samenwerking, indirect betrokken afdelingen en wiens belangen]

3.1.1. Hiërarchisch gezien, waar bevinden deze personen zich tot jou?

[Denk aan teamleden, leidinggevend, medewerkers uit andere teams, etc.]

3.1.2. In hoeverre merk je die hiërarchische verdeling in de praktijk?

Subtopic: Interests and expectations

3.2. Welke belangen hadden de personen betrokken bij deze situatie? [per persoon]

3.3. Welke specifieke verwachtingen hadden deze personen van jou, naar jouw idee?

3.3.1. Waar baseer jij deze verwachtingen op?

[Denk aan uitgesproken, afgesproken, eigen verwachtingen van anderen]

3.4. Welke verwachtingen had jij van de betrokken personen?

Subtopic: Conflicting expectations

3.5. In hoeverre denk je dat de verschillende belangen in dit geval samengingen?

3.6. In hoeverre heb jij aan de verwachtingen kunnen voldoen?

3.6.1. Waarom ging dit wel of niet?

3.7. In hoeverre voldeden de betrokken personen aan jouw verwachtingen?

3.7.1. Waarom ging dit wel of niet?

3.8. Heb je de combinatie van deze personen en/of belangen eerder als complex ervaren?

3.8.1. [Ja] Kan je een voorbeeld noemen? [Nee] Wat maakte deze situatie uniek?

4. Topic: Personal values

[Inleiden dat de volgende vragen over het gevoel van de respondent gaan]

4.1. Toen je je nog in de situatie bevond, wel gevoel had je hier toen bij?

4.1.1. Waar werd dit door veroorzaakt?

4.2. In hoeverre kon jij jezelf zijn in deze situatie?

4.2.1. Wat versta je daar onder?

4.2.2. Waarom ging dit wel of niet?

4.3. Zou je achteraf anders hebben willen handelen?

4.3.1. [Ja] Wat had je anders willen doen?

4.3.2. Waarom ging dit toen niet?

4.4. Welk gevoel heb je als je terugkijkt op deze situatie?

4.5. Als je terugkijkt op deze situatie, wat heb je daarvan geleerd als je iets geleerd hebt?

Closing

Dat was mijn laatste vraag. Heb jij nog iets toe te voegen aan dit gesprek of aanvullende vragen voor mij?

- Ja → [Vragen beantwoorden].

- Nee → *Dan wil ik je nogmaals hartelijk danken voor je tijd en inzet. Ik ga nu de opname stopzetten. Het interview is bij deze afgesloten.*

2. Translated questions in English

Opening [literally]

I am Silke Dekker, I am studying Educational Sciences at Utrecht University. In my thesis I study role conflicts from HR-practice, with the use of relevant literature, dilemmas from practice and interviews. To gain insight into your experiences, I have selected [amount of] situations that you submitted beforehand, which will be the topic of this interview. The situations concern [read aloud input of participant]. This interview will take about 60 minutes. As you read in the informed consent, the interview will be audiotaped and processed literally afterwards. I would like to emphasize that you can interrupt me at any time, ask questions or end the interview without having to give an explanation. Besides that, your personal data and answers are treated confidentially and are processed anonymously. I would like to thank you in advance for your time and effort. Is there anything you would like to object to, or do you have any questions?

- Yes → Answer questions.
- No → In that case the interview and audiotape will start right now.

1. Topic: The situation itself

The questions that follow will concern [read aloud situations literally]. If we have time, I will also ask these questions about the other situations.

1.1. Can you describe shortly what the reasons for the situation was?

1.1.1. What constituted the real dilemma or problem to you?

1.1.2. Why did this form a problem?

2. Topic: Job demands and responsibilities

[Address that the following questions will concern the participant's job responsibilities]

Subtopic: Job responsibilities

- 2.1. Which of your responsibilities or tasks were involved?
- 2.2. How often do you execute these kinds of tasks?
 - 2.2.1. Are this more operational or more long-term, strategic responsibilities? [For each responsibility]
- 2.3. To what extent do you find/think that these tasks belong to your responsibility and job?
 - 2.3.1. On what do you base this? [Such as assumptions, routine, job description, request from manager]

Subtopic: Conflicting job responsibilities

- 2.4. To what extent would you describe these (combination of) responsibilities as complex?
 - 2.4.1. What is complex about it? // Why is this not complex?
- 2.5. To what extent did you experience your tasks as complex?
 - 2.5.1. What is complex about it? // Why is this not complex?
- 2.6. What did you eventually do in this situation?
 - 2.6.1. Why did you choose to/what made you act like that?
 - 2.6.2. How do you think you did this? To what extent do you find that your responsibilities have been completed sufficiently?
 - 2.6.3. Were there any consequences?
- 2.7. Did you previously experience likewise situations with regard to these responsibilities?
 - 2.7.1. [Yes] Can you give an example? [No] Why was this situation unique?

3. Topic: Expectations

[Address that the following questions will concern the people involved]

Subtopic: The persons involved

3.1. Who/which functions were involved in this situation?

[Such as collaborations and which departments or interest were involved indirectly]

3.1.1. Hierarchically seen, how do these people relate to you?

[Team members, managers, employees from other teams, etc.]

3.1.2. To what extent do you feel these hierarchical relations in practice?

Subtopic: Interests and expectations

3.2. Which interests did the people involved have? [For each person]

3.3. Which specific expectations did these people have from you, do you think?

3.3.1. On what do you base this?

3.4. Which expectations did you have from the people involved?

Subtopic: Conflicting expectations

3.5. To what extent do you think the different interests could go hand in hand?

3.6. To what extent were you able to live up to the expectations?

3.6.1. Why (not)?

3.7. To what extent did the people involved live up to your expectations?

3.7.1. Why (not)?

3.8. Did you experience this combination of people or interests as complex before?

3.8.1. [Yes] Can you give an example? [No] Why is this situation unique?

4. Topic: Personal values

[Address that the following questions will concern the feelings of the participant]

4.1. When you were still in the middle of this situation, what feelings did you encounter/experience?

4.1.1. What was this caused by?

4.2. To what extent were you able to be yourself?

4.2.1. What do you mean by this?

4.2.2. Why was this (not) the case?

4.3. Is there anything you would have wanted to do differently when looking back?

4.3.1. [Yes] What?

4.3.2. Why was this not an option at the time?

4.4. What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you look back at this situation?

4.5. What did you learn from this situation looking back?

Closing

That was my last question. Do you have anything to add or ask?

- Yes → [Answer questions]
 - No → *Then I would like to thank you again for your time and effort. I will stop the audiotape right now. The interview is finished.*
-

Appendix C: Informed Consent

1. Original form in Dutch

Respondentnummer:

Toestemmingsverklaring

“Dilemma’s uit de HR praktijk in kaart”

Afstudeeronderzoek Silke Dekker

Ik heb uitleg gekregen over het onderzoek. De informatie over het onderzoek heb ik goed gelezen. Ik heb mijn eventuele vragen over het onderzoek gesteld. Ik heb goed nagedacht over of ik aan het onderzoek wil deelnemen. Ik mag op ieder moment stoppen met het onderzoek. Ik hoef niet uit te leggen waarom ik wil stoppen.

- Ik doe wel mee aan dit onderzoek
- Ik doe niet mee aan dit onderzoek

Naam :

Geboortedatum :

Datum :

Handtekening :

Mocht u geïnteresseerd zijn in het eindresultaat van dit onderzoek, laat dan hier uw mailadres achter :

Voor eventuele vragen en opmerkingen kunt u ten alle tijden contact opnemen met Silke Dekker via s.j.dekker@students.uu.nl

2. Translated form in English

Informed Consent

“Insights in dilemmas from HR-practice”

Graduation thesis Silke Dekker

I have received an explanation about the study. I have read the information about the study well. I have asked the questions I have about the study. I have considered my participation carefully. I am allowed to quit this study at any time. I do not have to give any reason for quitting.

- I do participate in this study
- I do not participate in this study

Name :

Date of birth :

Date :

Signature :

If you are interested in the results of this study, leave your email address here:

For any questions or comments, you can contact Silke Dekker at any time via
s.j.dekker@students.uu.nl

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

Appendix D: Overview of all intra-role conflicts

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

Core of the conflict	Intra-role conflicts in %	Summarized intra-role conflicts from participants
<p>1. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she wants to do or personally values.</p>	<p>11/24 = 45.8</p>	<p>HR-professional does not want to take over managers' HR-related tasks which they are reluctant to do.</p> <p>HR-professional wants to change budget issues of employees but is expected to only signal issues.</p> <p>HR-professional is expected to do own job rating but feels uncomfortable about this.</p> <p>HR-professional is expected to develop and implement an appraisal system she is personally against.</p> <p>HR-professional is expected to do coaching trajectory in limited amount of sessions due to costs, but prefers more sessions to coach well.</p> <p>HR-professional is expected to put employer's profit first but prefers honesty (which in this case exclude each other).</p> <p>Managing director expects HR-professional to do a job rating in a way that she finds unfair and prefers to do differently.</p>

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

HR-professional is expected to advise about underperformance of peer and therefore cannot be completely honest towards peer, which HR-professional prefers.

HR-professional feels like she is expected to work out vision statements in line with the vision/strategy of managing director, which she disagrees with.

HR-professional is expected to not make any allegations towards specific employee in case of misbehavior, but wants to change the culture which he undermines.

HR-professional is expected to stay out of hiring decision that undermines diversity targets and her own influence.

2. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with other expectations of the HR-professional.

7/24 = 29.2

HR-professional receives contradicting advice from external parties in reintegration trajectory.

HR-professional deals with expectations of company doctor in what she has to do, whom she distrusts, which contradict with expectations of employee on sick-leave.

HR-professional is expected to be present at local as well as central HR-meeting at the same time.

HR-professional is expected to treat information in conversations as confidential but also to develop policies based on issues that come up in these conversations.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

HR-professional is formally not expected to do administrative tasks but managers do expect her to, and she has own strategic reasons to do so as well.

HR-professional is formally not expected to do administrative tasks but managers do expect her to, and she has own strategic reasons to do so as well.*

HR-professional is expected to make decisions that benefit profit of the company and that benefit being a 'good employer'; expectations collide with each other in this situation.

3. Expectations of the HR-professional conflict with what she is able to do in her role.

6/24 = 25

Employees expect that HR-professional solves budget issues, but she is only able to signal the issues.

HR-professional expects herself to be able to change collaboration with external party and help out employees, but is not taken seriously in this.

HR-professional is expected to deliver an objective advice, but her opinion is influenced by previous work for an employee involved.

HR-professional does not know where to signal problems due to the complex structured teams, and can therefore not do her tasks well.

Employee requests that HR-professional supports in case of underperformance but HR-professional is already advising the contrary party and it has to remain like this.

INTRA-ROLE CONFLICTS IN HR

		Peer/colleague requests that HR-professional supports in case of underperformance but HR-professional is already advising the contrary party and it has to remain like this.*
4. Expectations of the HR-professional are unclear or undefined.	4/24 = 16.7	HR-professional is unsure whether she is in the right position to confront managing director with behavior. HR-professional received contradicting expectations and is now unsure what to do in this situation. HR-professional feels unsure if confronting team members with their behavior is up to her. HR-professional is unsure whether to attend staff meetings or not, and has nothing definite to base a certain decision on.

**Note:* Same description because of very similar intra-role conflicts.