# Emotion Management by Proxy: How HR Functions Manage Emotions in Devolved Settings[1]

■  **Johanna Finnholm[2]**
    *PhD student, University of Gothenburg, Department of Sociology and Work Science, Sweden*


■  **Kerstin Jacobsson**
    *Professor, University of Gothenburg, Department of Sociology and Work Science, Sweden*

**ABSTRACT**

*Change and crisis increase the need for organizations to manage employee emotions, such as fear or resistance to change. The human resource (HR) function is vital for such emotion management. In the Nordic context, characterized by pronounced human resource management (HRM) devolvement, managers interact with employees independently, while HR provides support and HRM practices. The article argues that devolvement necessitates a reconceptualization of the HR function's emotion management. Drawing on meeting observations and interviews in a Swedish public sector organization, the article examines how the HR function performs emotion management in a devolved setting. The concept of 'emotion management by proxy' is introduced, referring to the emotion management performed through an intermediary in order to manage the emotions of a third party. Emotion management by proxy was found to be achieved through three main tactics: managing managers' emotions; monitoring stakeholder emotions; and prompting and supporting managers' emotion work.*

**KEYWORDS**

*change management / emotion management / emotion work / HRM devolvement / HR function / HR work / organizational change*

## Introduction

Emotions are an integral part of organizational life (Sieben & Wettergren 2010), making emotion management a critical competence in any organization. Organizations' ability to manage emotions is especially vital in both planned organizational change and externally imposed crisis, since these events can evoke emotions such as fear, anxiety, stress, and resistance (e.g., De Clercq & Pereira 2022; Gunnarsdóttir 2016; Hiillos 2004). Not managing these emotions could pose a threat to organizational goals such as productivity and employee well-being. Traditionally, the human resource (HR) function has been expected to work closely with employees to safeguard their interests during organizational change (Ulrich 1997), and to act as a guardian of justice by mediating between employees and managers in crisis situations (Hiillos 2004).

However, the HR role has undergone significant transformation due to human resource management (HRM) *devolvement*, referring to the transition whereby managers primarily interact with employees independently, performing traditional HR tasks

---

(e.g., rehabilitation, recruitment, performance management) (Björkman et al. 2014; Kurdi-Nakra et al. 2022).[3] Devolvement is especially pronounced in the Nordic countries. Research from Finland emphasizes that devolvement has changed HRM to more broadly be a part of the responsibility of general management (Lemmetty et al. 2021), with the HR function being primarily focused on supporting managers and providing HRM practices. Devolvement is even more pronounced in Sweden, where managers perform many employee-related HRM tasks that HR practitioners perform in other countries (Tengblad 2023).

Further, as employees in Sweden tend to enjoy a high degree of autonomy, the managers' role of coaching and communicating is argued to be particularly vital (Bévort & Einarsdottir 2021). Nordic working life is characterized by decentralized empowerment, giving a great deal of decision-making to employees and managers at local levels (e.g., Klemsdal et al. 2017). HRM is characterized by a collaborative and participatory approach in the Nordic context (Einarsdottir et al. 2025). More generally, the Nordic collaborative labor market model, in combination with societal egalitarian values, place emphasis on mutual trust and cooperation between employers and employees (Bévort & Einarsdottir 2021). In conclusion, in the Nordic context, managers have the prime responsibility for interacting with employees, also during emotive events such as organizational change and crisis.

Consequently, while managers for the most part interact with employees independently in devolved settings, the HR function provides support to managers personally and in the form of HRM initiatives and practices. HR's limited direct interaction with employees makes the function dependent on managers for the successful implementation of HR initiatives (Stirpe et al. 2013), including those aimed at addressing employee emotions. It has been argued that, in order for managers to positively influence employee trust during organizational change, they must be emotionally skilled and be aware of their own feelings (Brundin et al. 2022). Moreover, to prevent conflicts, HRM practices must incorporate employees' perspectives (Lemmetty et al. 2021). Previous research indicates that HR practitioners actively seek to foster feelings of trust and fairness among organizational members affected by change (Abugre 2014; Amarakoon et al. 2018; Antila 2006; Bagdadli et al. 2014; Barratt-Pugh & Bahn 2015; Paik & Belcher 2012). Nevertheless, a notable research gap remains regarding how devolvement has influenced HR's collaboration with managers in implementing HRM practices to support organizational change (Finnholm et al. 2025), and specifically regarding how this shift has affected the management of emotions.

Much of the existing research on emotion management performed by the HR function is inspired by Hochschild's (2012) notions of emotional labor and emotion work that is performed by HR practitioners in direct interaction with employees and managers (Hiillos 2004; Kulik et al. 2009; O'Brien & Linehan 2014, 2018; Rivers 2019). However, devolvement fundamentally changes the conditions under which employee emotions can be managed by the HR function since classical emotion work—the display of specific emotions to manage others' emotions—requires some kind of direct interaction (Hochschild 2012).

---

[3] The HR function here refers to the collective of HR practitioners working in specialized roles that support the organization in matters related to HRM.

Thus, the present article proposes that devolvement necessitates not only an updated understanding but also a reconceptualization of the emotion management performed by the HR function in devolved settings when the direct, interactional emotion work in relation to employees is performed by the managers.

The argument is that in devolved organizations, the emotions of organizational members affected by a change or crisis (from now on referred to as stakeholders), are not only addressed at the strategic level through HRM processes and practices and at the operational level by emotion work, but the HR function also works *with* and *through the managers* to facilitate the management of emotions in stakeholder groups. To capture the fact that HR works with and through the managers in handling emotions in the devolved setting, the article introduces the concept of *emotion management by proxy*, defined as working with a stakeholder for them, in turn, to manage the emotions of a third-party stakeholder. This conceptualization is intended to convey how HR practitioners work toward managers, as individuals or groups, for these in turn to manage the emotions of employees affected by change or crisis, thus taking account of the fact that the HR function's management of emotions in the devolved setting also takes other forms than the more well-known emotion work (following Hochschild 2012).

## Aim and research question

Thus, the aim of the present article is to enhance our knowledge of the ways in which the HR function can work with managing emotions in devolved settings when the direct emotion work in relation to employees is performed by the managers. Based on a case study of a large Swedish public sector organization handling (among other changes) the emotive event of the COVID pandemic, the article explores the implications of HRM devolvement for emotion management by addressing the research question: how does the HR function work with regard to managing emotions in a devolved setting?

In the following section, we spell out our contribution in relation to existing research.

## Previous research

By bridging the literature on HRM devolvement and that of organizational emotion management, this article offers a new perspective on emotion-management in the workplace (cf. Bolton 2005) and responds to calls for further research on how devolvement impacts work practices (Björkman et al. 2014; Intindola et al. 2017; Kurdi-Nakra et al. 2022). As the literature on the handling of emotions in organizations is vast (see, e.g., Bolton 2005; Fineman 2007; Sieben & Wettergren 2010), for the purpose of this article, we focus on previous research on the role of the HR function in emotion management.

There are two main strands of research on the HR function's involvement in handling emotions in organizational change processes. One strand examines how HR practitioners perform emotion work in direct interaction with employees and managers, which is highlighted as especially related to emotive events (De Clercq & Pereira 2022; Hiillos 2004), or complex personnel issues in which HR practitioners can provide vital support to managers (Kulik et al. 2009).

The other strand of research examines how the HR function plays a critical role in building support structures to manage emotions. This includes providing counseling services for employees in crisis (Misra et al. 2023), creating HRM practices that support organizational change (Arrowsmith & Parker 2013; Raeder 2019; Sarvaiya et al. 2021), and implementing HR initiatives to build trust, reduce anxiety, and mitigate employee resistance to change (Abugre 2014; Bagdadli et al. 2014; Barratt-Pugh & Bahn 2015; Paik & Belcher 2012). Welch and Welch (2012) have put forward that such proactive work to manage employee emotions could contribute to organizations achieving their strategic goals. It has been shown that HR failure to provide such support structures in organizational change can lead to heightening employee stress (Smollan 2017). Huy's (2002) study of the role of middle managers' role of balancing emotions in radical change shows that this work depends on a proximity to stakeholders to pick up on their emotions. Similarly, Ulrich's (1997) employee advocacy role highlights the importance of HR practitioners being close enough to detect employee reactions with an ability to communicate the consequences of change initiatives to management.

Devolvement further accentuates the need for building structures and HRM practices for emotional support. So far, research has identified contextual factors that facilitate devolvement, such as the specific tasks being devolved, and whether leaders receive training and organizational support systems (Intindola et al. 2017). However, a need for qualitative studies exploring how HR practitioners work to support, motivate, and influence line managers' implementation of HR practices has been identified (Kurdi-Nakra et al. 2022). In a devolved setting, where the HR practitioners have fewer interactions with employees, the main focus for the HR function is on working with managers, while employees constitute a stakeholder group reached by the HRM practices that the managers implement (Björkman et al. 2014). Consequently, although the HR function can support change initiatives in both active and more passive roles (Alfes et al. 2010), act as change agents (Brown et al. 2017) and provide valuable insights in mergers and acquisitions (Antila 2006), much of its work in relation to change is to support the managers (Finnholm et al. 2025; Rønningstad 2018). Over-rationalization of change management can leave managers to handle complex emotion work on their own, while also having to manage their own emotions (Clarke et al. 2007), which can result in emotional dissonance (Gunnarsdóttir 2016). Finnholm et al. (2025) specifically propose integrating emotion management into HR change competence, and issue a call for research on the HR function's role in change management in devolved settings. Thus far, however, the consequences of HRM devolvement for HR's management of employee emotions in emotive events outside of providing support structures and HRM practices have largely escaped research attention. As devolvement shifts the logic to a more indirect, coaching and supporting role for HR practitioners (Tengblad 2023), so more indirect and supportive forms of emotion management performed by HR practitioners gain salience.

This article brings a distinct contribution to existing research by identifying and conceptualizing the strategic-level forms of emotion management performed by the HR function in a devolved context, thereby also highlighting the variety of ways organizational emotion management can be performed beyond the classical emotional labor and emotion work, as defined by Hochschild's (1979, 2012) seminal work.

## Key concepts

Drawing on existing theories of organizational emotion management and emotion work, we situate our concept *emotion management by proxy*. Hochschild ([1984] 2012) famously distinguished between *emotion work* and *emotional labor*. Building on Goffman's findings that people suppress and selectively present emotions to shape how they are perceived, Hochschild added the perspective that individuals also actively seek to evoke specific emotions. Hochschild's concept of emotion work focuses on how the regulation of emotions functions as a social exchange, shaping relationships both in personal life and at work (Hochschild 1979). In a workplace context, Hochschild (2012) later developed the concept of emotional labor to highlight how emotion work becomes part of a job role, prescribed by the employers for the purpose of generating company profit. This is achieved by eliciting specific feelings in others, such as customers, where perceived authenticity is crucial for effectiveness and thus goal attainment. It is this 'manipulation' of employees' emotions that enables organizations to commodify employee emotions (Hochschild 2012).

Hochschild's focus was on work within the private service sector, stressing the commodification of feelings under capitalism (Hochschild 2012). This view has been critiqued for being deterministic, for missing out on the skills that all emotion work requires, and for disregarding the employees' own agency. Moreover, it has been argued that emotion work at the workplace, rather than being prescribed by the employer, may be guided by the norms of professional/occupational communities (Bolton 2005; Burkitt 2014). The complexity of emotion management when going off script, or rather adhering to the looser scripts of a professional role, has been highlighted (Humphrey et al. 2008; Wettergren & Blix 2022). Moreover, it has been argued that emotion work may be motivated by generosity (Bolton & Boyd 2003), empathy (Terpe & Paierl 2010), and as part of building relationships (Burkitt 2014), not only privately but also in the workplace.

In this article, we follow the view of emotion management as also guided by multifaceted occupational norms. As previous research highlights, although the HR practitioners mainly take on the managerial perspective in situations of organizational change (Finnholm et al. 2025), they are also motivated to find solutions that benefit the employees (Alfes et al. 2010) and work to protect employee well-being (Bagdadli et al. 2014; Misra et al. 2023). Such work may entail handling an acute emotive situation or anticipatory and preparatory action to prevent disruptive emotive situations from occurring.

Moreover, emotion work can be a collective effort, performed as part of an occupational role, as shown in Burkitt's (2014) study of the emotion work of nurses. Whether performed individually or collectively, successful emotion work requires emotional skills. Emotional skills may entail attentiveness to the situation (Burkitt 2014), detecting emotional cues and thus picking up emotional needs—or potential needs—of organization members. Emotional cues here refer to both verbal and nonverbal signals that communicate what a person feels, to anticipate her reactions. In the case of HR practitioners, this pertains to discerning the emotional needs of managers as well as those of employees.

In line with previous research, we use *emotion work* to refer to efforts performed in direct interaction to affect the emotions of a person or group. In the devolved setting, HR practitioners' emotion work is mainly performed in interactions with managers. Nevertheless, at times, HR practitioners also perform emotion work in relation to

employees, mostly related to highly emotive events such as personal grievances, performance issues, or acting as a facilitator in group settings. However, such interactional emotion work does not exhaust the emotion management carried out by HR practitioners. As the present article shows, the HR function also performs strategic-level work to manage emotions, not only by providing HRM initiatives but also through *working with and through managers* to facilitate the management of emotions in stakeholder groups. This work is especially critical in the devolved setting, since the desired outcomes depend on the emotion work by managers, performed in settings where the HR practitioners themselves are not present.

Thus, we distinguish between emotion management performed collectively by HR practitioners in relation to stakeholder groups as a form of 'strategic-level emotion management', and 'emotion work', reserving the term 'emotion work' for the operational work performed in direct interaction with employees or managers. Moreover, to conceptualize working with and through others with the intent of managing the emotions of a third-party stakeholder, we offer the concept of *emotion management by proxy*. This concept is empirically derived through an abductive coding process (described in the next section), and it serves to supplement the existing concept of emotion work by capturing a form of indirect emotion management requiring working through an intermediary. As shown later, such *emotion management by proxy* is typically performed collectively by HR practitioners, although it can also be performed individually. It is initiated when emotions are potentially disruptive to organizational goals of employee well-being, change management, and productivity. The work can not only be anticipatory and preventive, but also reactive, particularly in response to sudden and emotionally charged events. The subsequent analysis identifies three main tactics by which HR's *emotion management by proxy* is performed in practice.

## Methods and data

The analysis is based on a case study of a large Swedish public sector organization that navigated both the emotive event of the COVID-19 pandemic and more planned organizational changes. The case organization is considered a critical case (Flyvbjerg 2006) for examining HR practitioners' emotion management strategies in a devolved setting for several reasons. First, Sweden exhibits a high level of HRM devolvement combined with lean HR functions that focus on strategic HR issues, and HR practitioners tend to have more behavioral education than in other countries (Tengblad 2023). Further, Sweden—together with other Nordic countries—has laws, regulations, and cultural norms that emphasize egalitarian values and shared interests, positioning employees as key stakeholders (Bévort & Einarsdottir 2021).

The organization examined in this study had an HR function structured according to the widely adopted HR transformation model, which emphasizes standardized, top-down HRM processes and practices developed by strategic HR units (Boglind et al. 2011; Häll 2024). This was combined with a highly decentralized way of working the organization's operational areas. In these areas, HR practitioners in HR partner and HR manager roles provided broad support to the managers, including developing HR initiatives tailored to the areas they supported. The HR function held a recognized position within management teams, including the top management team. Although HR

initiatives in general required managerial approval, the HR function had greater owner-ship over certain issues. Notably, the HR director was granted the mandate and respon-sibility to coordinate part of the organization's crisis management efforts during in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The case study approach (Flyvbjerg 2006) offered the opportunity to follow events over an extended period and facilitated the collection of data from multiple sources on the same events. This provided a contextualized examination of how the HR function operated in practice. As data collection was primarily conducted during the pandemic, this became especially pronounced in the empirical material. Additionally, the work-ing from home mandate introduced new challenges for the management of emotions, since informal interactions and arenas disappeared. Although the societal crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the focus of the interviews, interviewees were also asked to reflect on the HR function's role in organizational change more broadly. The semi-structured interview guides included questions concerning the HR function's role, tasks, and contributions in relation to change. Nevertheless, the crisis accentuated the central-ity of organizations' ability for strategic-level emotion management, which is the focus of the present article.

The data were collected by the first author and consist of qualitative interviews combined with meeting observations. The data collection period spanned from 2021 to 2024, with most of the data collected during the case organization's working-from-home directive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, all meeting observations and most interviews were conducted digitally. A total of 26 participants were inter-viewed, with five interviewed a second time to follow up on specific change initiatives. Interviewees were invited through invitation letters and snowball sampling, whereby participants could recommend others for inclusion. Sampling criteria were based on occupation, role, and hierarchical level. Sixteen of the interviewees worked within the HR function, while the others held managerial, specialist, or project-leading roles. Two interviews were documented through note-taking due to a lack of consent for audio recording, while the remaining 29 interviews were recorded and transcribed. Meetings were documented through note-taking. In total, 15 hours and 50 minutes of meeting observations were conducted, whereof five rather informal operational HR meetings (each lasting approximately 1 hour 20 minutes), and five monthly HR team meetings (each lasting approximately 1 hour 50 minutes).

No sensitive personal data were collected during the study. Participants received written information about the study prior to the interview or meeting. Consent was secured through verbal affirmation at the beginning of each interview, and meeting par-ticipants were informed that they could contact the researcher if they wished to with-draw from the study. Given that the study was conducted within a single organization, certain participant data, such as gender, role, and the exact wording of quotations, were modified where necessary to protect participants, without altering meaning in any sig-nificant way. Interview participants were assigned a number (e.g., IP 1), while meeting participants were assigned a letter (e.g., HR A). Meetings were labeled with an 'M' and numbered sequentially. All quotes were translated into English during the writing process.

Thematic analysis inspired the identification and analysis of patterns in the mate-rial (Braun & Clarke 2006). The analytical process began with note-taking throughout the data collection period, accompanied by continuous coding and re-examination of

the data (Nowell et al. 2017). Coding, conducted by the first author using Atlas.ti, was abductive and performed in two stages. Initial coding was data-driven, based on close readings of transcripts and field-notes, focusing on topics related to the HR practitioners' roles, organizational change, crisis, and emotions. An example of such data-driven coding was the following quote by an HR practitioner (IP 15): 'Give them an opportunity to vent. [---] It can be that they feel better just by talking about it'. This quote was given data-driven codes such as 'managers vent to HR' and 'HR provides emotional support to managers'. In the second stage, a coding frame was developed, drawing on theories of emotion management, including concepts such as emotion work and emotional cues. This frame was applied to relevant parts of the data-set, identified in the previous open, data-driven coding process, which were then re-coded in terms of theoretically informed coding. For example, the previous quote was given the code 'emotion work'. Other examples of theoretically informed codes included 'picking up on signals and emotional cues' and 'HR prepares managers for emotion work'. These theoretically informed codes were then transferred to a whiteboarding application, using visualization to analyze interrelations between codes and emerging themes, for example, the themes 'provide settings for managers to share emotions', 'helping managers regulate emotions', and 'managers able to focus on work'. The categorizing of themes and exploring how these were interconnected led to the finding that HR practitioners worked to manage emotions of stakeholder groups that they did not interact with directly. This part of the analytical process of is illustrated in Figure 1.
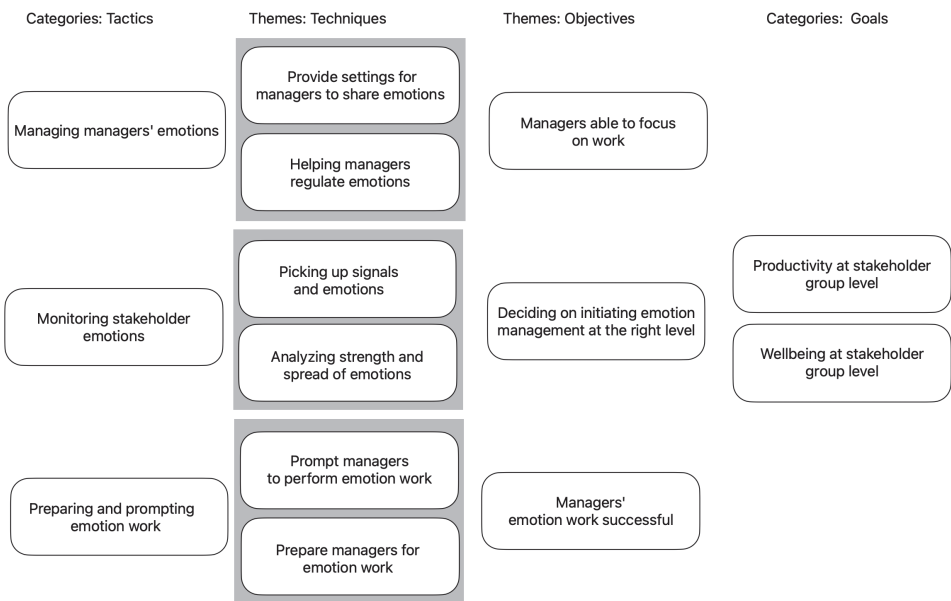


**Figure 1.** Visualization of categories and themes in the process of analysis (Source: Authors).

The temporal and spatial separation between HR and the actual interactions where the emotion work was performed positioned the managers as intermediaries. This finding was conceptualized as *emotion management by proxy.* Furthermore, three main tactics

used by the HR function to achieve emotion management by proxy were identified: (1) managing managers' emotions, (2) monitoring stakeholder emotions, and (3) prompting and supporting managers' emotion work. These tactics will now be explored in depth.

## Findings

The following findings demonstrate how the HR function works with strategic-level emotion management to manage emotions of stakeholders affected by emotive events in devolved settings. We find that *emotion management by proxy* is achieved through three tactics.

### Tactic 1: Managing managers' emotions

The purpose of the tactic of *managing managers' emotions* was to protect the managers' well-being and ability to focus on work, such as performing emotion work in relation to employees. The HR practitioners considered emotional self-regulation essential both for effective leadership and emotion work, and this tactic primarily relied on two techniques: providing settings for managers to share emotions and helping managers regulate their emotions. How these techniques were performed varied depending on how widespread emotions were within the managerial collective. The HR practitioners performed emotion work and provided individual support to managers. However, to manage emotions circulating within a group of managers or the managerial collective as a whole, HR practitioners collaborated to perform stakeholder-group-oriented emotion management.

An HR practitioner described prioritizing the managers' emotional needs: 'As an HR [practitioner], you build relations, so when you notice someone feeling bad, you give even more of yourself, so maybe the [working] days have become longer' (IP 11). This shows how, although these interactions are between two equal colleagues that are members of the same management team, the interactions also include emotion work on behalf of the HR practitioner. However, the managers in the case organization tended to focus on technical issues and regulations, which affected how emotions were talked about. This meant that although the HR practitioners supported managers with managing emotions—their own and those of the employees—this was rarely explicitly stated. Instead, HR practitioners relied on personal and more informal interactions with individual managers and used functional interactions to incorporate emotional support. This could be done by casually checking in on how the managers and their employees were doing, especially during particularly emotive events. An HR partner (IP 15) emphasized the importance of letting the managers talk about their emotions:

> […] really just like a dialogue:—Hi how are you doing? Give them an opportunity to vent. And then:—Do you need any help?—No. It can be that they feel better just by talking about it.

These interactions rely on established trust that allows managers to openly share their challenges. The HR practitioners offered emotional support through listening, coaching,

and advising to help managers regulate their own emotions. The HR practitioners also engaged in emotion work by utilizing their own emotions to influence managers' emotional states. When the emotions circulated in a group of managers, the HR practitioners could use collective stakeholder-group-oriented emotion management. In the following example, HR practitioners discussed the need to maintain digital meetings for managers as the organization transitioned back to on-site work during the later stages of the pandemic:

> HR A:    We scheduled the meetings specifically to talk openly about this—both the personal aspects and what managers should ask the employees. We were there to listen, capture concerns, and strengthen them together. There are rules we must follow, but we also need to consider how we can support employees who struggle with change.
>
> HR B:    It's exactly like they say—you have to save yourself first before helping others. Managers first need to acknowledge out loud that they too are afraid or find it difficult to return. Only then can they stand in front of employees, represent the employer, and feel confident in that role. We used a [preparatory] survey to explore what reactions they expected to encounter.
>
> HR C:    It's like on an airplane—you must put on your own oxygen mask first.
>
> HR A:    We started by asking; How do you really feel about this? We shared our own challenges and set the tone by being open. (Meeting notes, M 14)

The HR practitioners had identified emotions of reluctance and fear being widespread among both managers and employees. This illustrates how HR practitioners provide support at the appropriate level, depending on the spread of emotions, and develop collective initiatives to manage them effectively. However, the initiative was not openly advertised as dealing with emotions, but rather as informing and answering questions on regulative matters relating to going back to working on site. Through the initiative, the HR practitioners used their own emotions as tools to create a space for managers to express their emotions, helping to normalize having conflicting feelings and planning ways to set the stage for an open talk about emotions among the managers. The HR initiative functioned both to help managers regulate their own emotions and as preparation for similar discussions with the employees.

When emotions were spread throughout the whole organization, such as during the pandemic, strategic-level emotion management could be performed by creating HR initiatives for all the managers. However, since managers' emotions were not in general considered legitimate to address directly, functional matters—such as regulatory, communicative, or administrative concerns—could serve as justification. Although the pandemic was a health-related societal crisis that paved the way for emotions to be more legitimately addressed and managed, open discussions were mostly concerned with employees' emotions. An HR manager explained the purpose of an HR initiative to broadcast information regularly to all the managers:

> […] make them feel safe, in giving them the right information and guidance and everything. It was always the same voice, it was the same face, for 700 days. […] to create safety and calm in the organization, for people to focus on what they should focus on. (IP 16)

This specific set-up effectively helped to calm managers as a stakeholder group, even though, on the surface, it appeared to focus solely on administrative and regulatory matters, such as work-from-home mandates or regulation of home office reimbursement policies. The structure of the HR function, aligned with the organization's line management, allowed it to reach managers at all levels, and provide both broad, stakeholder-group-oriented assistance and individualized assistance.

The findings indicate that managers agreed that the HR function and its initiatives collectively helped managers remain calm and focused on their work, such as supporting the employees with their emotions, in the pandemic. A manager underscored how vital the proactive work of the HR function was in achieving this goal:

> They had an assortment of different initiatives. They handled the emotions in the pandemic. Again, this is the responsibility of the manager, that we can never put on HR, it is the closest manager that handles them [the employee emotions]. What does that manager feel? That if you need support, then you can turn to HR. (IP 10)

This illustrates how the managers in the devolved setting view employee emotions as a matter solely for the managers—and not the HR function. The example also highlights that support given to the managers to regulate their own emotions provides a basis from which to effectively manage employee emotions.

The HR initiatives presented here show that the HR function depends on identifying emotional cues from the managers, collectively analyzing these to adjust the initiatives toward the stakeholder groups and identifying when further action is needed. This process of analyzing and adapting differentiates these HR initiatives from mere counseling or information-giving, and highlights the centrality of the second tactic: *monitoring stakeholder emotions*.

## Tactic 2: Monitoring stakeholder emotions

The second tactic identified, *monitoring stakeholder emotions*, uses the technique of picking up signals about the emotions of stakeholder groups—encompassing both employees and managers—especially when parts of the organization are affected by change. Then, HR practitioners collectively use the technique of analyzing the strength and spread of these emotions in the stakeholder groups. The purpose of this tactic is to determine when there is a need to manage emotions, such as when the change or crisis could negatively impact well-being or work performance, and at what level. HR practitioners gather emotional cues from interactions, primarily with managers. For instance, by providing functional or emotional support to individual managers, HR practitioners also gather signals on how managers as a stakeholder group are responding to change or crisis. The analysis is ongoing and not always formalized or planned; HR practitioners can informally discuss signals they have identified in their interactions, such as questions from the managers in relation to the situation. In the following observation from an operational HR meeting, the objective was to determine whether to continue the informal digital meetings initiated by the HR team during the pandemic, which were aimed at identifying needs and mitigating emotions among managers:

HR A:       Raise a flag if something comes up. If we see a need to follow up on the new [working back at the office] policy. Maybe more infrequently, now we have a need to mingle at the office and have less meeting time. Could be every third week.

HR B:       I'm thinking that there could be other things that people might be worried about. (Meeting notes, M 4)

This shows how the HR practitioners collectively apply the two techniques: discussing what emotional signals exist and analyzing the strength and spread of these in the stakeholder groups. Monitoring allows the practitioners to then adapt initiatives to the emotional needs that the managers have, either relating to their own emotions or to their role of managing employee emotions. The emotions of stakeholder groups within the organization were monitored through various interactions, particularly in activities instated to manage emotions, such as the digital meeting discussed above. The main stakeholder group that HR practitioners interacted with and attended to, was the managers; however, unions and employees were also considered important stakeholder groups. 'Listening in' provided the HR practitioners with the knowledge to discern when and how to act, or to adjust the action being taken. The signals were collectively analyzed by HR practitioners and could also be informed by metrics, such as sick-leave data or employee surveys. However, effective analysis of these metrics and other signals requires a deep understanding of the local culture and the ability to engage in informal conversations with managers, as emphasized by an HR manager:

[…] we who work close with the operation have learned the business, the language, understand the culture. We can translate signals to what they could mean and discuss these with the managers. […] I think part of the success with being close to the business incorporates, or at least makes it easier to re-interpret, what the real issue could be. (IP 4)

Here, the interpretations of metrics through informal dialogue were emphasized, highlighting how the stakeholder-group-oriented-work could not function on the basis of centrally provided metrics alone, since creating the right initiatives required deeper knowledge that gained from trustful relations with individual managers. Further, the specific position of the HR function, following the organizational line of managers, enabled the HR practitioners to both monitor and initiate action at all levels. For example, needs that were widespread throughout the organization could be channeled to HR practitioners in strategic roles, who could then initiate or adjust organization-wide initiatives.

   HR practitioners presenting an initiative could also take note of questions, body postures, and a general feel for how people reacted in the meeting. However, in these formal settings, the possibility of picking up on people's feelings can be limited and more informal interactions filled an important role. This highlights the importance of personal interactions, or of instating feedback loops that utilize the interactions and relations other HR practitioners have to get these signals. The importance of, and personal ability to, utilize meetings to pick up on emotions was highlighted by an HR manager:

All HR people are different. But I have a lot of tentacles so the most valuable for me in these meetings is picking up on the atmosphere in the room. If I enter, and employees are

discussing a dilemma, what is the feeling when I enter? Does it become silent? Or—come and sit down, we are discussing this… (IP 8)

In conclusion, HR practitioners were found to monitor stakeholders' emotional states and reactions in general, during emotive events, and in response to HR initiatives. While metrics could be used, HR practitioners also relied on formal and informal interactions and trust-based relationships with managers to detect emotional cues and analyze these signals. To analyze signals, HR practitioners also engaged colleagues, drawing on previous experience and local knowledge. This highlights how the tactic of monitoring stakeholder emotions relies on feedback loops to help determine when to adjust ongoing initiatives and how to manage emotions. The analysis serves to determine whether the emotions are widespread across stakeholder groups of employees or managers and if there is a need for strategic-level emotion management.

### Tactic 3: Prompting and supporting managers' emotion work

The third emotion management tactic, *prompting and supporting managers' emotion work*, focuses on HR practitioners' efforts to encourage managers to deal with the emotions of others, primarily employees. The purpose of the work therefore extended beyond providing support for the individual managers' benefit to also, through supporting managers, contribute to employee well-being. The HR practitioners used this tactic both with managers as individuals and with managers as groups. The HR practitioners emphasized their role in helping managers to have the courage and sustained ability to navigate emotive situations and difficult issues over time. This included teaching managers to anticipate and prepare for potential reactions and using experiences of emotive events as learning opportunities.

 However, how they performed emotion work in relation to employees was considered crucial for the managers' emotion work to reach the intended results. To achieve this outcome, HR practitioners used scenarios to prepare the managers for reactions during events (or situations) that they would have to handle on their own. The HR practitioners also provided information material and knowledge of rules and regulations. If these preparations were not sufficient, or if the manager was junior or in an especially tricky situation, the HR practitioner could attend the meeting alongside the manager, thereby also building relations. However, as this HR partner shares, most interactions are done by the managers on their own and the HR practitioner prepares them:

Ask [the managers] how they are thinking and how they can plan for a talk […] To set up a scenario that—this is what I think they will say when you say this, and then you can answer with these and these arguments. (IP 19)

This description depicts how the HR practitioners work with emotions by preparing the managers that have the main responsibility of dealing with employees and their emotions. The HR practitioners' intent is not limited to the manager; rather, success is measured by whether the event with the employees turns out well. In this example, the objective that the HR partner strove for was for the manager to handle an employee that was not doing their work, risking an unfair work environment and workload for

colleagues. Such managing of an individual is to be done in a proper way; nevertheless, the HR practitioners' allegiance lies more at the stakeholder-group level, and not with specific individuals. Thus, their emotion management work is not focused on the inter-actional level, but rather intended to calm emotions that could, in the end, jeopardize strategic goals.

For the HR practitioners, working with the managers' emotions and behaviors is the main tool available in relation to the management of employees' emotions in the devolved setting. The HR practitioners prompt the managers to plan how they will facilitate these talks and convey their own view on emotions as something that is pos-sible to anticipate, manage, and direct. The HR practitioner cited above also conveyed a view on emotion that highlighted the variety and individual differences as part of teaching the manager how emotions function and not to take reactions personally. In this case, using scenarios that break reactions down to a variety of reaction schemes was a way to help the manager expect and handle a variety of possible reactions in a calm and rational manner. The HR practitioners tried to teach managers to view emotions as natural reactions to emotive events, so that the managers did not take these as per-sonal failures and become reactive. The following HR practitioner stressed the advan-tage of having studied behavioral science and having experience of different changes in supporting managers:

> You can feel a sense of confidence in knowing that if an individual reacts in a certain way, you can also help the manager understand that this reaction isn't because they did some-thing wrong. It's simply a natural human reaction. So, we must just keep working on it and stay committed. Instead of, say, if a manager gets scared and backs off, and then the changes never actually happen. (IP 15)

This illustrates how prompting and supporting managers' emotion work are fac-tors that depend on both knowledge and experience. Highly emotive situations in which HR practitioners work alongside managers could serve as learning opportuni-ties, with the goal of encouraging managers to handle these situations independently. This opportunity for learning and support was essential for both the manager and the HR partner in developing their emotion management skills. However, to perform this emotion management efficiently, the HR practitioners combined individual sup-port with strategic-level initiatives geared towards managers as group. One of the HR partners explains how the pandemic gave an increased need for formalizing settings for managers since they did not have access to normal outlets in day-to-day informal interactions:

> [We had] an idea of why we don't gather these managers in a group. And then we facilitate that group, talk about the challenges and what they make you feel and think. [---] (IP 11)

Since the managers in most interactions are on their own with the employees, learning and support could give them courage to keep on dealing with the matter. Exposure to emotive events provided HR practitioners with the skills necessary to perform emotion management at the strategic level, directed towards stakeholder groups, while also gen-erating signals and feedback that contributed to the tactic of monitoring. This serves as a vital function when rolling out strategic initiatives or supporting change and crisis, as

the support to managers provides valuable insight into how the organizational stakeholder groups are responding.

## Discussion

This article set out to explore the implications of HRM devolvement for emotion management, addressing the research question: how does the HR function work with regard to managing emotions in a devolved setting? As managers increasingly interact with employees independently, HR practitioners have developed ways of managing the emotions of organizational members affected by change or crisis, that goes beyond the traditional emotion work. As shown, HR practitioners' strategic-level emotion management entailed taking a supportive and consultative role in relation to managers, but also work to prompt and indirectly support their emotion work in relation to employees. Thus, HR practitioners devised ways of working both *with* and *through* the managers. Hence, we have identified a type of emotion management that has escaped attention in previous research, namely how managing emotions is performed through an intermediary, conceptualized as *emotion management by proxy*.

The analysis identified three tactics by which *emotion management by proxy* is achieved: (1) managing managers' emotions; (2) monitoring stakeholder emotions; and (3) prompting and supporting managers' emotion work. The analysis further showed how the HR function performs this form of emotion management as a collective effort, mainly used in emotive events affecting larger stakeholder groups. Figure 2 visualizes emotion management by proxy and how the three tactics are connected and feed into one another, including the connection to means, objectives, and strategic goals.
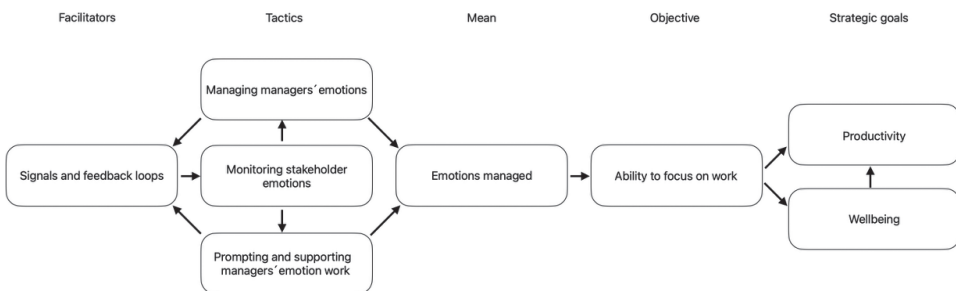


| Facilitators | Tactics | Mean | Objective | Strategic goals |

Managing managers´ emotions

Signals and feedback loops — Monitoring stakeholder emotions — Emotions managed → Ability to focus on work → Productivity / Wellbeing

Prompting and supporting managers´ emotion work

**Figure 2.** Emotion management by proxy (Source: Authors).

As illustrated in the figure, signals and feedback loops serve as facilitators. As also illustrated, the tactics involving interactions with managers (e.g., managing managers' emotions and prompting and supporting managers' emotion work) can provide feedback and signals. These signals, and emotional cues are analyzed as a part of monitoring stakeholder emotions to discern if there is a need to prevent disruptive emotions from hindering a stakeholder group's ability to focus on work—or risk their well-being. Additional measurements can be to implement initiatives or structures to support managers dealing with emotions or to push managers to deal with employee emotions. The findings highlight that the HR practitioners view the ability of a stakeholder group to

focus on work as dependent on being able to manage their own emotions. Consequently, the findings highlight how the management of emotions was viewed by HR as vital for both organizational strategic goals of well-being and for productivity at the stakeholder group level. In the context of the pandemic specifically, the HR functions' collective efforts and initiatives were viewed by both managers and HR practitioners as a pivotal part of how well the organization managed the pandemic. Examples include how HR worked to keep stakeholder groups calm and able to focus on work, which was part of the objectives guiding the emotion management. The following discussion integrates and discusses our findings in relation to existing research.

As shown, *emotion management by proxy* depends on obtaining information about employees' emotions, especially in relation to change or crisis (Ulrich 1997). In the highly devolved setting of the case organization, the HR function primarily obtained signals about emotions through direct or indirect input from the managers who interacted with the employees. However, emotions were not normally addressed openly, and HR depended on its ability to leverage established, trust-based relationships with managers to collect and analyze signals as a collective work (Burkitt 2014). These signals on emotions and feedback loops within the HR functional line replace the face-to-face interaction typically involved in emotion work (Hochschild 2012) and are essential for *emotion management by proxy* to function. This highlights how operational tasks and relations involving trust can be integral for the strategic part of the work to function, and for the HR function to be able to contribute to strategic goals.

The findings in this article could also be vital for HR work in regular (non-crisis) settings, particularly in work contexts characterized by wide-spread decentralized empowerment and decision-making at local levels, such as the Nordic countries (e.g., Klemsdal et al. 2017). Further, the Nordic model emphasizes collaborative practices as vital for organizational legitimacy (Bévort & Einarsdottir 2021), increasing the importance of attending to both managers' and employees' emotional needs. Previous research from project-based organizations in Finland also highlight how HRM practices can provoke negative reactions if they are not adapted to employee expectations (Lemmetty et al. 2021). Lemmetty et al. (2021) further emphasize that work built on autonomous employees makes a human centered approach especially important.

Furthermore, although HR practitioners provide valuable specialist support and occasionally lead change initiatives (Alfes et al. 2010; Antila 2006; Brown et al. 2017), devolvement mainly involves offering functional and emotional support to managers dealing with change (Finnholm et al. 2025). Previous research has highlighted managers' need for support when dealing with employee emotions (Kulik et al. 2009; Rønningstad 2018). This article demonstrates how HR support in devolved settings operates through both individual-level and stakeholder-group-oriented efforts. In doing so, the HR function helps bridge the gap between the overly rational approach to change management and the and the complex, unscripted emotion work that managers undertake when engaging with employees affected by change (Clarke et al. 2007).

Previous findings highlight how HR initiatives can positively affect employee emotions during change (Abugre 2014; Bagdadli et al. 2014; Barratt-Pugh & Bahn 2015; Paik & Belcher 2012). The present article develops insights into how this work is performed in a highly devolved setting where it is the managers that mainly interact with employees (Björkman et al. 2014). HR practitioners engage in *emotion management*

*by proxy* because they view credible emotion work by managers as vital for gaining employees' trust during change and crisis (Brundin et al. 2022; Humphrey et al. 2008), and subsequently to achieving the strategic goals of well-being and productivity. These findings lend support to Welch and Welch's (2012) finding that proactive emotion work contributes to organizational strategic goals and that this can be done through building support structures. However, this article adds much-needed insights on how this work is performed in the devolved setting (Intindola et al. 2017; Kurdi-Nakra et al. 2022), enabling managers to work with emotions proactively.

The HR practitioners depend on being perceived as authentic to be trusted and to interact in long-term relationships with managers and employees (O'Brien & Linehan 2014), while also needing to find arguments that are legitimate and convincing to ensure that managers invest and engage in HR initiatives (Arrowsmith & Parker 2013; Francis 2002; Guest & King 2004). The findings show that the HR practitioners adapt regarding how openly they address emotions to ensure that each situation is legitimate, more direct regarding informal personal interactions, and that it is presented as information on regulations or crisis management when addressing managers as a stakeholder group. However, this strategy risks reinforcing a dominant focus on effectiveness and measurability (Francis 2002), while HRs' work with managing emotions remains invisible and under-researched (O'Brien & Linehan 2018). Still, even when emotions are not openly valued on their own, this does not mean that they can be dismissed or bypassed. Although the scholarly and occupational debate focuses on strategic work and HR's contribution to strategic goals, this article suggests managing emotions on all levels is important for the realization of these organizational objectives and goals.

## Implications

This article's findings carry implications for research as well as practice. First, the results offer insights into how organizations can work proactively to handle change and crisis, while also giving room to involve stakeholder groups strategically in change work. Strategic-level emotion management can be key to preventing failures at the implementation stage and can be a way to protect employee well-being in change processes. Second, the three tactics and the concept of *emotion management by proxy* presented herein can be useful in peer learning in workplaces and networks (O'Brien & Linehan 2014, 2018) and in educating junior HR practitioners (Rivers 2019) on the variety of emotion management tasks performed by the HR function. Third, the findings highlight the importance of HR practitioners working as a collective and having relationships of trust with managers in order to pick up on signals relating to emotions. This underscores the benefits of operational tasks in relation to the HR function's strategic-level work with emotions, since these provide interactions that build relations and settings where emotions can be addressed and create a situated knowledge that takes many interactional events to build. Fourth, the concept of *emotion management by proxy* can open the door to discovering further perspectives of middle managers' roles in balancing emotions during change (Huy 2002). Future research could also examine the HR function's strategic emotion management in relation to other stakeholders (e.g., key personnel, candidates, unions) and specific tasks (e.g., change projects, negotiations, individual HRM practices).

## Limitations

Being a critical case study, this article has its limitations. Employee emotions might be particularly important for organizational legitimacy in the Nordic context, given its combination of a collaborative labor market model, the emphasis on collaborative HRM, and societal egalitarian values. Furthermore, the situation during the pandemic led to emotions and their management being more salient and legitimate to address. Moreover, the HR function also needed to develop new ways to manage emotions in this situation. These factors might limit empirical generalization. However, the article has shown that the HR function used the three tactics in relation to other, more regularly occurring, emotive events, such as organizational change or difficult employee situations. This suggests wider applicability. We offer the concept of *emotion management by proxy* and the figure as an analytical generalization, the empirical relevance of which will need exploration in future research across a variety of contexts.

## Conclusion

This article has contributed novel insights into the way the HR function works when managing emotions during emotive events such as change and crisis in the devolved context, when working mainly with and through managers. The article has offered the concept of *emotion management by proxy* and has richly illustrated its workings and the complexities that this work entails. This concept could further HRM devolvement literature, highlighting that emotion management is still a part of the HR functions' work in relation to their strategic contribution. The article also gives an original contribution to the field of research on emotion work and emotion management, where the concept can be used when emotions are managed through others in different settings. Examples could include other occupations that help manage the complex emotion work of others during rapidly evolving emotive events, where more scripted training and regulations may prove insufficient. More research is needed on the variety of ways in which emotions are dealt with in new organizational arrangements and the critical competences needed for such work.

## Acknowledgements

## References

Abugre, J. B. (2014). Caretakers or HR managers: The role of HR managers in facilitating the acquisition of public enterprises of developing countries by MNCs, SAGE Open, 4(3): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014548166

Alfes, K., Truss, C., & Gill, J. (2010). The HR manager as change agent: Evidence from the public sector, Journal of Change Management, 10(1): 109–127. http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1111/1748-8583.12005

Amarakoon, U., Weerawardena, J., & Verreynne, M.-L. (2018). Learning capabilities, human resource management innovation and competitive advantage, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 29(10): 1736–1766. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1209228

Antila, E. M. (2006). The role of HR managers in international mergers and acquisitions: A multiple case study, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 17(6): 999–1020. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190600693322

Arrowsmith, J., & Parker, J. (2013). The meaning of 'employee engagement' for the values and roles of the HRM function, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24(14): 2692–2712. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.763842

Bagdadli, S., Hayton, J. C., & Perfido, O. (2014). Reconsidering the role of HR in M & As: What can be learned from practice, Human Resource Management, 53(6): 1005–1025. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21671

Barratt-Pugh, L., & Bahn, S. (2015). HR strategy during culture change: Building change agency, Journal of Management & Organization, 21(6): 741–754. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2014.95

Bévort, F., & Einarsdottir, A. (2021). Human resource management in the Nordic context. In E. Parry, M. J. Morley, & C. Brewster (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Approaches to Human Resource Management: 209–238. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190861162.013.10

Björkman, I., Ehrnrooth, M., Mäkelä, K., Smale, A., & Sumelius, J. (2014). From HRM practices to the practice of HRM: Setting a research agenda, Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance, 1(2): 122–140. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-02-2014-0008

Boglind, A., Hällstén, F., & Thilander, P. (2011). HR transformation and shared services: Adoption and adaptation in Swedish organisations, Personnel Review, 40(5): 570–588. https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481111154441

Bolton, S. C. (2005). Emotion Management in the Workplace (Vol. 190). Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Bolton, S. C., & Boyd, C. (2003). Trolley dolly or skilled emotion manager? Moving on from Hochschild's managed heart, Work, Employment and Society, 17(2): 289–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017003017002004

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, M., Kulik, C. T., Cregan, C., & Metz, I. (2017). Understanding the change–cynicism cycle: The role of HR, Human Resource Management, 56(1): 5–24. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21708

Brundin, E., Liu, F., & Cyron, T. (2022). Emotion in strategic management: A review and future research agenda, Long Range Planning, 55(4): 102144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2021.102144

Burkitt, I. (2014). Emotions and Social Relations [electronic resource]. London: SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473915060

Clarke, C., Hope-Hailey, V., & Kelliher, C. (2007). Being real or really being someone else? Change, managers and emotion work, European Management Journal, 25(2): 92–103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2007.02.004

De Clercq, D., & Pereira, R. (2022). How human resource managers can prevent perceived pandemic threats from escalating into diminished change-oriented voluntarism, Personnel Review, 52(6): 1654–1676. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-06-2021-0430

Einarsdottir, A., Bévort, F., Sandvik, A. M., Rizov, M., Smale, A., & Tengblad, S. (2025) 'Sometimes collaboration is the better strategy: institutional context and the calculative and collaborative HRM-performance relationship in the Nordics, 1999–2021', The

International Journal of Human Resource Management 36(12): 2051–2082. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2025.2483745

Fineman, S. (ed.) (2007). [2000] Emotions in Organizations, 2nd edition, London: Sage.

Finnholm J., Wallo A., Allard K., & Tengblad, S. (2025) Reconceptualizing HR change agency: Introducing a framework and propositions for future research, Personnel Review 54(7): 1643–1666. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2024-0446

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research, Qualitative Inquiry, 12(2): 219–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

Francis, H. (2002). The power of "talk" in HRM-based change, Personnel Review, 31(4): 432–448. https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480210430355

Guest, D., & King, Z. (2004). Power, innovation and problem-solving: The personnel managers' three steps to Heaven? Journal of Management Studies, 41(3): 401–423. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2004.00438.x

Gunnarsdóttir, H. M. (2016). Autonomy and emotion management. Middle managers in welfare professions during radical organizational change, Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 6: 87–108. https://doi.org/10.19154/njwls.v6i1.4887

Häll, A. (2024). Lost in translation: The human resource business partner in a Scandinavian context, Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 15(1): 49–66. https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.148116

Hiillos, M. (2004). Personnel managers and crisis situations. Emotion-handling strategies. Ekonomi och Samhälle No 136, Helsinki: Hanken, Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration.

Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure, American Journal of Sociology, 85(3): 551–575. https://doi.org/10.1086/227049

Hochschild, A. R. (2012). [1984] The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling. University of California Press.

Humphrey, R. H., Pollack, J. M., & Hawver, T. (2008). Leading with emotional labor, Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23(2): 151–168. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810850790

Huy, Q. N. (2002). Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: The contribution of middle managers, Administrative Science Quarterly, 47(1): 31–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/3094890

Intindola, M., Weisinger, J. Y., Benson, P., & Pittz, T. (2017). The evolution of devolution in HR, Personnel Review, 46(8): 1796–1815. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-01-2016-0010

Klemsdal, L., Ravn, J. E., Amble, N., & Finne, H. (2017). The organization theories of the industrial democracy experiments meet contemporary organizational realities, Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 7(52): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v7iS2.96687

Kulik, C. T., Cregan, C., Metz, I., & Brown, M. (2009). HR managers as toxin handlers: The buffering effect of formalizing toxin handling responsibilities, Human Resource Management, 48(5): 695–716. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20311

Kurdi-Nakra, H., Kou, X., & Pak, J. (2022). The road taken and the path forward for HR devolution research: An evolutionary review, Human Resource Management, 61(2): 239–258. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22091

Lemmetty, S., Keronen, S., Auvinen, T., & Collin, K. (2021). Conflicts related to human resource management in Finnish project-based companies, Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 11(1): 85–107. https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.122226

Misra, S., Ponnam, A., & Banerjee, P. (2023). COVID-19 induced new workplace HR practices: Practitioners' perspectives from India, Management and Labour Studies, 48(2): 261–279. https://doi.org/10.1177/0258042X231155314

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria, International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16(1): 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

O'Brien, E., & Linehan, C. (2014). A balancing act: Emotional challenges in the HR role, Journal of Management Studies, 51(8): 1257–1285. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12098

O'Brien, E., & Linehan, C. (2018). The last taboo? Surfacing and supporting emotional labour in HR work, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 29(4): 683–709. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1184178

Paik, Y., & Belcher, J. S. (2012). Key HRM strategies for M&A integration in the global banking industry: A comparative study of the USA, Europe and South America, European Journal of International Management, 6(6): 676–696. https://doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2012.050422

Raeder, S. (2019). The role of human resource management practices in managing organizational change, Gruppe. Interaktion. Organisation. Zeitschrift Für Angewandte Organisationspsychologie (GIO), 50(2): 169–191. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11612-019-00465-1

Rivers, E. (2019). Navigating emotion in HR work: Caring for ourselves? Personnel Review, 48(6): 1565–1579. https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-07-2018-0244

Rønningstad, C. (2018). Us and them – First-line management and change resistance, Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 8(2): 5–22. https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.v8i2.106152

Sarvaiya, H., Arrowsmith, J., & Eweje, G. (2021). Exploring HRM involvement in CSR: variation of Ulrich's HR roles by organisational context, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 32(21): 4429–4462. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1660698

Sieben, B., & Wettergren, Å. (eds) (2010). Emotionalizing Organizations and Organizing Emotions. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/0.1057/9780230289895

Smollan, R. K. (2017). Supporting staff through stressful organizational change, Human Resource Development International, 20(4): 282–304. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2017.1288028

Stirpe, L., Trullen, J., & Bonache, J. (2013). Factors helping the HR function gain greater acceptance for its proposals and innovations: Evidence from Spain, International Journal of Human Resource Management, 24(20): 3794–3811. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.778320

Tengblad, S. (2023). I den bästa av världar? Om organisering av HR/HRM i Sverige. Cranet rapport 2. [In the best of worlds? About the organization of HR/HRM in Sweden. Cranet report 2]. CGHRM. https://www.gu.se/global-hrm/

Terpe, S., & Paierl, S. (2010). From bureaucratic agencies to modern service providers: The emotional consequences of the reformation of labour administration in Germany. In B. Sieben & Å. Wettergren (Eds.), Emotionalizing Organizations and Organizing Emotions (pp. 209–229). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230289895_11

Ulrich, D. (1997). Human Resource Champions: The Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Welch, C. L., & Welch, D. E. (2012). What do HR managers really do? Management International Review, 52(4): 597–617. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-011-0126-8

Wettergren, Å., & Blix, S. B. (2022). Prosecutors' habituation of emotion management in Swedish courts, Law & Social Inquiry, 47(3): 971–995. https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2021.71