

# An Exploration for How to Engage Line Managers in HRBP at Sany Heavy Case Organizations

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last decades, the shared human capital promotes the construction of organizational HR Business Partnering (HRBP) model. However, few empirical studies note the role of line manager in HR transition process, and from the line manager's perspective to research HRBP construction in practice. This study is conducted as case study at the Sany Heavy case organizations and involves its HRBP construction. By analyzing interview transcripts from Sany Heavy's line managers and HR professionals, this article finds that the complex relationship between line managers and HRs is creating resistance to value of the partnering. To explore problems behind this partnering, the interpretative analysis and social construction perspective are used. The study result suggests that the relationship between the parties is dynamic, complex and dependent upon the sufficient communication between line managers and HRs as well as the clarity role responsibility in the partnership.

**Keywords:** *HR business partnering(HRBP), line manager, relationship, interpretative analysis*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 90's, many organizations are perusing a new human resource management way to improve business effectiveness and efficiency, which promotes the emergence and development of HR Business Partnering (HRBP) model[1]. The HRBP is predicated on the notion that HRs will partner with senior managers to support the delivery of business goals, line managers will take responsibility for many of the tasks traditionally carried out by HR and employees will be called upon to access HR services in new ways. Actually, on numerous occasions HRBP indeed cannot quickly be measured effectiveness after implementation because success of the partnering depends on careful nurturing of the relationship with line managers[2]. Nevertheless there are few literature which focuses on the issue of how partnering is constructed from Line manager's perspective. Hence, in order to explore how to engage line managers in HRBP, the case Sany Heavy organization(the largest China construction machinery manufacturer) is utilized, and two research objectives are proposed in this article: (1)To investigate the gaps between the seeming perceptions of line managers and HR professionals and HRBP model current practice state in Sany Heavy case organizations. (2)To discuss views related to this type of partnership in Sany Heavy of HRs and line managers in order to analyse practical problems of change management.

## 2. SANY HEAVY CASE STUDY

The construction of HRBP is an uninterrupted, dynamic process where participants are individual, involving relational practices that emerge within relationships and include people into dialogue. Hence it is important to analyse views of line managers and HR professionals shown in interview transcripts from respective perspectives, then use interpretative analysis method to compare and extract their core standpoints expositied.

### 2.1. Data collection Approach

This article is based on Sany Heavy case organizations to explore so it needs sufficient context information and data what can represent standpoints of line manager role and HRs. To extract underlying core clues involved this partnering to obtain relevant findings ,various ways are used including collect related HR planning documents to identify the context of the Sany Heavy HRBP structure and secondary data towards case organizations which are collected: from interview transcripts by Chengdu Economic Development Institute(CEDI)[3] and other documents related HRBP model structure from online database. Besides, to reduce the bias about successful HRBP construction[4], this article selects equal scale case organizations is to as much as possible: the three different regional filiales of Sany Heavy (i.e. Sichuan, Chongqing and Southwest). CEDI utilizes semi-structured interviews to collect relatively detailed

interview transcripts from 26 line managers (including specific questions and answers) and other summarized general information from 170 HR professionals (e.g. classified responses based on interviewees standpoints: affirmative, neutral or negative, etc.) are offered. In order to describe how partnering is constructed at Sany Heavy, documents designed for the HR community to share information about the HR optimization process are also used.

### 2.2. Framework for Data Analysis

This article applies a thematic analysis to design a classification system to present the 170 interview transcripts and the interview data of 26 line managers. From interpretative analysis perspective, the first stage involves close reading of the transcripts a number of times and making notes. Subsequently, it focuses more on notes, trying to formulate a concise phrase at a slightly higher level of abstraction which may refer to a more psychological conceptualization[5]. It is beneficial for this study to analyse the empirical data as in this way each theme shows a set of criteria and the data within each theme can then be compared and interrelated. The key factors can be extracted as analysis aspect effectively to explore new findings (Figure-1 shows):

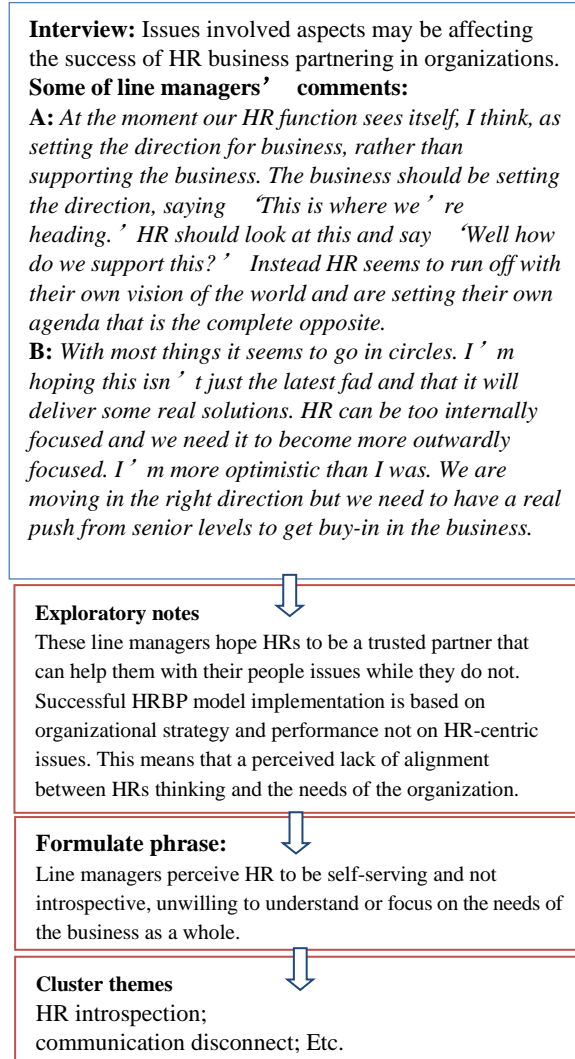


Figure1 Extracts from case interview transcripts

## 3. FINDINGS

This section from the interpretative perspective analyses the information and cluster their themes, grouping two general research objectives. Firstly it introduces HRBP structures of Sany Heavy case organizations and identifies current gaps of HRBP practice state. Then, it based on the two above aspects to interpret underlying perceptions of line managers and HR professionals and explore solutions.

### 3.1. Objective 1: Gaps of Current Practice State of HRBP

To achieve the research objective 1, this article grades respondents standpoints as strength score and from interpretative perspective to identify their key words. By analyzing the interview information below, it can find some gaps in the perceptions of current state of Sany case

organizations HRBP. The interview transcripts presents that when asked issues involved “Whether you think the current partnering model is successful or not”, “What organizational benefit can obtain from current partnering”, the 26 line managers and 170 HR professionals shown different perceptions. CEDI recorded 26 line managers’ answers and gave the statistical result of 170 HR professionals’ responds based on the strength score of their standpoints (e.g. Very successful, Mostly successful, Mostly unsuccessful etc.). Figure2 shows that over half of them literally mentioned that current HR business partnering as at least mostly successful. It seems quite encouraging, however after subdivide their standpoints it can find that only 7% of line managers thought the model was very successful and over a third thought it was either mostly unsuccessful. On the contrary, HRs shown a relatively positive view of the situation, with over77% of respondents rating HR business partnering as successful. 50% of HRs thought HRBP had improved line managers’ effectiveness. It can be find that the differences between HRs and line managers are again stark towards what benefits HRBP brought (as Figure3 shows). This may suggest that HRs who are closer to the model in practice are more aware of benefits which it is delivering.

Two aspects can be concluded from the analysis of these interview transcripts. Firstly, there is a direct and significant relationship between the success of the HR business partnering in practice and the extent to which the line manager understands and supports the reasons for its implementation, and is sufficiently skilled to play an active and effective role within it. Additionally, there appears to be significant gaps in the perceptions of HR professionals and the line manager when it comes to the benefits of the partnering model, and how well it is delivering maximum value to the business.

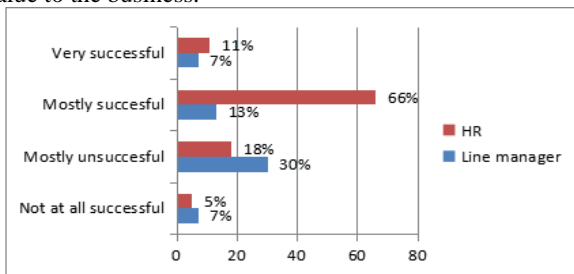


Figure 2 Ratings of the success of Sany case organizations HRBP

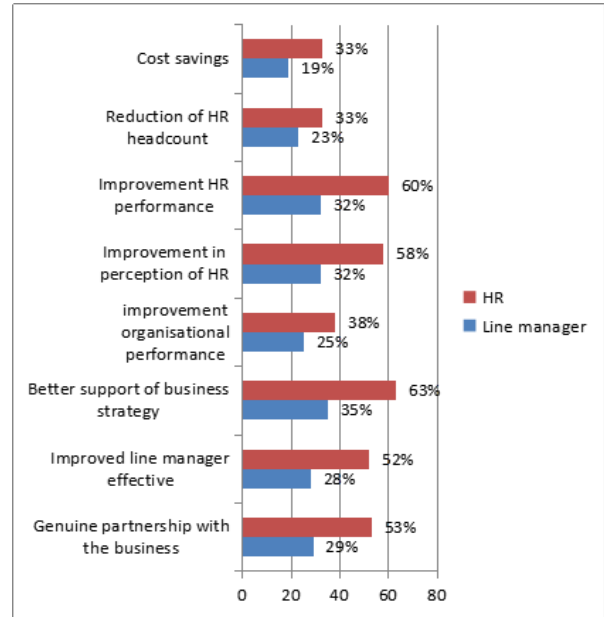


Figure3 Benefits of Sany case organizations HRBP

### 3.2. Objective 2: Practical Problems of Change Management

Some key dimensions are extracted (i.e. Better Communication; Information Exchange; More Sharing) from interviewed line managers via interpretative method. It can be find that when implementing HR business partnering it is crucial to treat ‘Communication’ as a change management issue, involving all stakeholders, including the line manager, in planning and implementation. Firstly, poor communication is reflected on line managers’ perception about the reasons for HRBP implementation, more than 1/3 of line managers have little or no understanding of it. When they are asked about issues involved the reason for HRBP implementation, they showed a confused state. Secondly, few of line managers have been actively involved in the change process as more than 70% of line managers propose they feel they are left with an increased workload and they do not experience benefits from the HR transformation so they are not willing to share information and opinions. In addition, most of line managers think HR is self-serving and ignores the systematic organizational objective. They hope HRBP model can provide a link between line managers and HRs, particularly shared services. Due to insufficient partner communication, line managers do not have clarity understanding of their roles workload too. They are not clear about line management accountabilities and what services an HR business partner can provides, and do not ensure whether can be clear in articulating their expectations of their business partner so line managers complain and adopt a negative attitude towards this partnering. Overall, understandably, line managers will quickly become advocates for this new way of working if they have experienced good results from HRBP or when they have first-hand experience of the model delivering benefits to

them and to the business. As Brockbank[6] notes that value is defined more by the receiver than the giver, but the giver has to know what value is and when and how to create it. Namely once having sufficient communication, the more line managers feel involved, the more they understand the role of them and the more they are likely to embrace and support the new way of working. Actually, if HRs are willing to invite, listen to, understand and act on views of line managers when reviewing and refining the HRBP model in practice, they can pick up and pass on concerns and requirements of line managers' role what they need to be addressed as the business partnership which is refined and developed in organizations.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Via the Sany Heavy case study the two research objectives are analyzed and involved findings are interpreted, this article proposes some recommendations to engage line managers in HRBP better, as follows: (1) Manage the HRBP implementation as the organizational change. HR business partnering is too often viewed as an HR agenda but it is a significant organizational change with implications for a wide range of stakeholders, both inside and outside HR. The implementation of HR business partnering is more likely to succeed if organizations follow best practice in change management, involving all stakeholders, both in HRs and line managers, in design, planning and implementation. (2) During the change process, more communication is important for line managers and HRs, this helpful for clarity role responsibilities for the two parties and reduces the situation where resentful line managers can become saboteurs of HR business partnering and even fierce critics of HR itself. HRs also need introspection to acknowledge the importance of the relational aspect, mutual credibility and the ability to collaborate, challenge and engage with their line manager partners through a fluid and dynamic relationship. (3) Both line managers and HRs need to pay more attention to the importance of integrated partnering and whole organizational objective. HRs need to create a shared vision with line managers of its future operation-demonstrating what additional value will be delivered by HR and what might be required of all parties along the way to achieve. (4) The engagement gap of line managers can be bridged if HRs make it a priority to seek and understand the views of the line throughout the partnering structure and ensure that HR strategy is fully aligned with that of the organization.

In conclusion, some scholars have discussed the HRBP model and concentrated on HR perspective to research the HR transformation, little examine how this model play out in practice and how line managers perceive this partnering. By putting this research topic into a specific company helps to explore empirical conclusions and find 'communication' is the critical dimension to bridge gaps in Sany Heavy HRBP construction. Additionally, in the inflectional factors related to this partnering, not only line manager and HR the two participants, for instance, the senior director is also can be

seen as a core dimension. If researchers analyse this HRBP from senior director's perspective, it can believe that other more new findings will be explored.

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