What matters to managers?
– A qualitative case-study on managers’ use of planning and development talks

Emma Mercier
Vad är viktigt för chefer?
– En kvalitativ fallstudie om chefers användning av planerings- och utvecklingssamtal
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**Titel:** Vad är viktigt för chefer? En kvalitativ fallstudie om chefers användning av planerings- och utvecklingssamtal

**Title:** What matters to managers? A qualitative case-study on managers' use of planning and development talks

**Författare:** Emma Mercier

**Sammanfattning:** Globalisation is affecting businesses worldwide. As a result of this, organisations are realising that the key to competitive advantage is not in modern technology or production; rather, it is in attracting and maintaining a committed workforce. Performance management is a widely advocated way to develop human resources. By conducting a case-study, this paper took a qualitative approach to understand what elements of the performance appraisals are important to managers at the Organisation. The managers at the Organisation were interviewed and a thematic analysis was applied to the data. Results show that trust and honesty are important components of the performance appraisals, to managers at the Organisation. Also, the feedback the managers received from the employees was said to be the greatest contributor to the managers' own development. The managers further requested additional support to be able to conduct successful performance appraisals, as well as increased clarity in goal-setting for employees, career development and in taking over employees.

**Nyckelord:** Performance Management and Appraisal, Planning and Development Talks
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On a personal note

A special ‘thank you’ goes to my husband for his tireless guidance and constant encouragement. I am further grateful to my beloved daughter for being my greatest source of wisdom and inspiration.

To my parents and my brother, thank you for always being there for me.

Spring of 2019,

Emma Mercier
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1. INTRODUCTION
This chapter aims at providing the reader with an understanding of the background of the study. Also, it includes definitions of the problem area, purpose and research question. At the end of the chapter, key concepts are defined and the disposition of the paper is presented.

1.1 Background
Globalisation is affecting businesses worldwide and internationalisation has become a pervasive element of business as a result of this (Buchelt, 2015). Organisations are realising that the key to competitive advantage is not in modern technology or production; rather, it is in attracting and maintaining a committed workforce (Crawshaw, van Dick and Brodbeck, 2012). Properly managing human resources is a way of building competitive advantage using unique features of human capital, since effectively managing employee competence, personality and behaviour lead to differing organisational outcome (Buchelt, 2015).

Performance management is a widely advocated way to develop employees (Cascio, 2014). Particularly, this refers to performance management strategies that help employees develop expertise that maximises their potential and innovative approaches to the design and delivery of HRD initiatives (ibid). The term ‘performance management’ is relatively new. It usually includes strategic business considerations and it can be a tool to help management improve organisational performance (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008). Performance appraisal and performance management constitute integral parts of modern human resource management. However, traditional takes on performance management have been subjected to critique; most often for a lack of effectiveness. Mainly reasons such as implementation difficulties as well as the challenge of setting measurable goals for employees are presented (Ahmed, Sultana, Paul, & Azeem, 2013; Law, 2007). There is a request for a broadening of performance management beyond the annual performance review process (Brown, O’Kane, Mazumdar and McCraken, 2019). Research widely supports the belief that there is a positive correlation between individual HR practices and organisational performance (Barney, 1991; Buchelt, 2015; Prowse & Prowse, 2009).

Effective performance management processes are presented as key priorities for multinational corporations in particular, if they are to maintain sustainable growth (Collings, McDonnell and Scullion, 2009).
Multinational corporations are complex and geographically diverse; therefore, the distribution of knowledge constitutes a central element of their strategic capability (ibid).

The study presented in this paper set out to explore performance management challenges of a global company in the manufacturing and assembly industry. Since the company wished to remain anonymous, they will be referred to as the Organisation throughout this paper. The Organisation operates in more than 100 countries and it is one of the largest employers in Sweden. It was founded more than 100 years ago and today it operates in a highly competitive global market. The Organisation strives and succeeds to be at the forefront of the industry. The innovative spirit of the Organisation has now come to influence the strategic takes on its HR policies, with a particular focus on performance management and performance appraisals.

The author of this paper was familiarised with the performance management challenges of the Organisation during a working life conference that took place in the autumn of 2018. The conference was organised by a multidisciplinary research centre that conducts working life research in collaboration with Linköping University. In the period that followed, the author of this paper was introduced to the collaboration that existed between Linköping University and the Organisation. The work that had been conducted was primarily concerned with developing ‘key performance indicators’, so called KPIs. These are defined as: “…a common way of quantitative monitoring of project progress in modern companies” (Staron, Nielsen & Bauman, 2018).

The Organisation expressed an interest and need in further exploring opportunities that might guide them in their future design of the performance management process. Together with representatives from the Organisation, a decision was made to conduct a case-study based on the experiences of managers at the Organisation. This is because previous research stresses the importance of managers in the performance appraisal process (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). The managers were chosen as units of analysis since they are the ones conducting performance appraisals with the employees; therefore, they are seen as key in the process of understanding and improving performance management processes (ibid).

1.2 Problem area
There has been a shift in the focus of performance management; one that calls for a more developmental nature of the process. Several global
companies, such as Adobe, GE and Deloitte have abandoned performance appraisal ratings and annual performance goals. Instead, they have adopted short-term goals which emphasise ongoing discussions between employees and their managers (Rock and Jones, 2015).

Today, the Organisation has a performance appraisal process that takes place on an annual basis; as a face-to-face meeting between the manager and the employee. The Organisation uses the term ‘planning and development talk’, from now on referred to as P&D talk, to refer to their annual performance appraisals. A common template is used to serve as a guideline in the P&D talks. Also, 50% of the Organisation conducts no consolidated evaluations of the P&D talks at company level. The current key performance indicators focus on completed P&D talks between the manager and the employee, without an evaluation of the quality of the talks. The managers at the Organisation register in their computers that the P&D talk has taken place. In addition to the annual P&D talks, the Organisation has one annual pay review with the employees; this review consists of two steps. The first step is referred to as the initial pay review, the second step is referred to as the final pay review.

In 2018, 50% of the Organisation adopted a more structured way of documenting the P&D talks according to a specific template. However, these other 50% are not included in this study since the first “results” of the new structured way would have been available in the spring of 2019 – halfway through the writing of this paper. The Organisation has thus expressed a need for a deeper understanding of how P&D talks are used today, in order to meet future performance management challenges. This expressed need is rooted in the identified research gap that is presented in 1.3 Purpose and research question.

1.3 Purpose and research question

The relevance of conducting this study is grounded in previous research. In general, scholars have scrutinised the lack of theoretical embeddedness of most performance management research (Buchner, 2007). It is stated that the impact of performance management will continue to be constrained as long as it remains a predominantly top-down process (ibid). Previous research states that studies on effective configuration of performance management systems is progressing; however, there is still much to learn about it (Pritchard, Harrell, DiazGranados and Guzman, 2008). In particular, it is of interest to understand which parts of the performance management system are vital for properly managing performance (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006).
Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) further highlight the crucial role of first-line managers in shaping performance management processes within organisations. According to them, it is key to maximally involve first-line managers and support them in managing performance management activities, in order to improve performance at employee and organisational level. According to Fletcher (2001), many studies that have been conducted in the area of performance appraisals have focused on non-managerial populations; this further strengthens the need to study managerial populations as units of analysis.

Hence, the relevance of conducting this study is concerned with two aspects. On the one hand it considers the interest of understanding what parts of the performance management system are crucial for properly managing performance. On the other hand, it looks at the pivotal role of first-line managers in the performance management process.

Additionally, it is relevant to conduct this study based on the Organisation’s expressed need for exploring opportunities that might guide them in their future design of the performance management process. Further, according to Brown et al. (2019), employees are the most common participant in studies of performance management research. This also strengthens the need to include the managerial perspective. By having managers at the Organisation as units of analysis, this study aims at contributing with further insights to the field of performance management, specifically with the elements of the performance appraisals that are important to managers.

Based on the presented relevance, the research question that will guide this paper is:

What elements of the performance appraisals are important to managers at the Organisation?

Since performance appraisals take place as a meeting between the manager and the employee at the Organisation, it is important to study the managers’ use performance appraisals. Previous research also stresses that first-line managers have a crucial role in shaping performance management processes (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). Also, as previous research has shown, there is a lot to learn about the performance management system (Pritchard et al., 2008); particularly about what parts of the performance management system are vital for the system to be effectively managed (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006).
1.4 Definitions
This subchapter aims at defining the concepts of performance appraisal, performance management and planning and development talks.

1.4.1 Performance appraisal and performance management
Performance appraisal and performance management are two central concepts in this study. Their meaning might appear evident; however, for the purposes of this study, these concepts will be further defined in an attempt to avoid any misunderstanding.

There are numerous definitions of performance management and performance appraisal. The author of this paper will depart from a definition by Aguinis & Pierce (2008), since their definition has been widely cited among various scholars (Haines & St-Onge, 2012; Budworth, Latham & Manroop, 2015). According to this definition, performance appraisal and performance management are related, but they are not the same. Performance appraisal refers to the formal process of an employee being evaluated; usually by his/her supervisor. The performance of the employee is then judged and assessed based on several criteria. In this process, the employee is scored and rated. Performance management, on the other hand, should be thought of as a macro-level activity. It consists of processes and policies that are put in place to facilitate employee performance. A performance management system begins with performance appraisal, but it will further include managing individual performance in a way that is consistent with the strategic objectives of the organisation (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008).

1.4.2 Planning and development talks
There are scholars that define performance appraisals as one element of the wider performance management system. In this perspective, performance appraisals are seen as annual evaluation exercises (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008). Nevertheless, there are multiple names for performance appraisals, or annual evaluation exercises (Claus and Briscoe, 2009; Kinicki, Jacobson, Peterson and Prussia, 2013). The Organisation studied in this paper refers to their annual performance appraisals as ‘planning and development talks’; however, these two terms are used interchangeably throughout this paper.
1.5 Disposition
The following chapter will present previous research and a theoretical framework identified for the purposes of this paper. Chapter 3 aims at informing about different methodological approaches; it seeks to explain to the reader how the study was conducted. Chapter 4 presents the results from the study. Chapter 5 is devoted to a discussion on the results, the method and it includes suggestions for future research. Chapter 6 will provide a conclusion of the study. Lastly, chapter 7 includes a list of references and appendices.
2. THEORY
This chapter aims at presenting previous research that has been identified for the purposes of this paper, as well as presenting a theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of the results.

2.1 Previous research
This subchapter presents performance appraisal trends and three distinct theoretical perspectives: capabilities driven HRD, the ‘psychological contract’ and organisational learning.

2.1.1 Performance appraisal trends
Traditionally, performance appraisals have been carried out as a meeting between the manager and the employee; resulting in the manager filling out an annual report on the employee’s performance. The overall objective of traditional performance appraisals was to deliver valid performance ratings, usually with a great focus on psychometrics. Today, this rather basic process has turned into a myriad of different activities that aim at developing employee competence, enhancing performance and distributing rewards. There are organisations that have kept a rather traditional view on the performance appraisal process. However, there is an upgoing trend among organisations worldwide to adopt a more strategic take on performance appraisals. This modern take on performance appraisals is characterised by a recognition of the importance of social and motivational aspects, as well as of the cognitive processes at work (Fletcher, 2001).

In terms of what is being appraised during performance appraisal meetings, there is a trend in the continuation of goal setting, i.e. the appraisals ought to focus on achievement against goals and on assessment of competencies (ibid). However, studies on contextual performance seem to offer new ways of thinking about job performance (Arvey & Murphy, 1998). Contextual performance is concerned with characteristics that go beyond task competence. It further enables behaviours that strengthen the effectiveness of an organisation (Fletcher, 2001). Also, contextual performance is perceived as arising from personality and motivation (Conway, 1999), whereas task performance is made up of cognitive ability, experience and skills (ibid).

Suggestions on how to assess contextual performance are concerned with the use of 360-degree feedback, “… as a way of measuring behavioural outputs relating to contextual performance, and to combine this with personality- type questionnaires” (Fletcher, 2001:476).
According to London and Smither (1995), one of the main purposes of 360-degree feedback, or so called multiple-source feedback, is to increase the employees’ level of self-awareness, so the way they assess themselves is in congruence with the way they are assessed by managers, peers and so forth. Various other studies have seen a positive correlation between higher self-awareness and better performance (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Furnham & Stringfeld, 1994). Walker and Smither (1999) also conducted a study in which they found that managers who discussed feedback with those who had provided it, showed significantly more improvement in ratings than those who did not. However, to assess multiple-source feedback systems, their effectiveness is measured to the extent to which they generate development plans and actions on the part of the feedback recipient (ibid).

Dweck and Leggett (1988) describe two distinct types of goal-orientation that employees pursue in achievement situations: learning goal orientation and performance goal orientation. The former refers to developing competency through new skills, the latter aims at providing adequacy of competence by avoiding criticism (ibid). Other scholars such as Phillips and Gully (1997) have found that learning goal orientation is positively, and performance goal orientation negatively, related to self-efficacy.

When looking further into the appraiser (usually the manager) and the appraisee (usually the employee) interaction, interpersonal relationships and lenient appraisal ratings are more likely to relate to the appraiser’s positive regard for subordinates (Lefkowitz, 2000). However, according to Klein and Snell (1994), there is no ‘best way’ to conduct an appraisal interview; the situation and the relationship between the manager and the employee will affect the appraisal interview. They state that criticism during the appraisal interview has a positive effect only where the person appraised has a good relationship with their manager, and that goal-setting has a greater impact on poor performers who report a poor relationship with their supervisors (ibid).

Other trends that have changed the context in which performance appraisals function are cultural diversity and information technology. When looking at cultural diversity, it is safe to say that the vast majority of HRD research stems from the USA, and to a lesser extent Western Europe. However, studies have shown e.g. that workers in UK react differently to feedback than workers in the USA (Smith, Dugan & Trompenaars, 1996); even if these two cultures can be perceived to be at least similar (ibid). This highlights the assumption that it can be
ineffective or even inappropriate to draw conclusions from e.g. US social psychological research, and to apply it on other cultures (ibid). Examples of this includes a study by Huo and von Glinow (1995); results show that managers in China were not willing to engage in a two-way communication in the appraisal process; since it is a high power distance culture, it is believed that the two parties constituting the appraisal process are not equals. Further, Fletcher and Perry (2001), showed that direct feedback is less appropriate in Russia than in the USA, since the Russian culture is more collectivist.

Additionally, technological developments have had a great impact on the performance appraisal process (Sulsky & Keown, 1998). By electronically monitoring performance, voluminous data about multiple dimensions of work performance can be recorded (Stanton, 2000). Thus, there is reason to believe that feedback will be sought after through electronic mail, rather than actual face-to-face meetings (Ang & Cummings, 1994). However, not all scholars are positive to this trend; Weisband and Atwater (1999) state that self-ratings are more inflated and therefore less accurate in electronic communication, compared to face-to-face mode. Also, entering and communicating assessments via a computer offers no chance of directly observing the recipients’ reactions (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991).

There has been a shift in the focus of performance management, one that calls for a more developmental nature of the process. Several global companies, such as Adobe, GE and Deloitte have abandoned performance appraisal ratings and annual performance goals. Instead, they have adopted short-term goals which emphasise ongoing discussions between employees and their managers (Rock and Jones, 2015). According to Brown et al. (2019), this shift can be explained by the changing nature of work, the need for increased teamwork and the need to attract and retain talent through more frequent feedback.

2.1.2 A triarchy of theoretical perspectives

According to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD, 2012), 75% of all workers will need retraining in the near future. In this transformation, human resource development plays a crucial role. Human resource development, widely known as HRD, can be defined as “…the integrated use of training, organisational development, and career development efforts to improve individual, group and organisational effectiveness” (McLagan, 1989:7). HRD systems further have significant roles in enhancing organisational capabilities (Farndale and Paauwe,
Organisations that offer a multitude of learning opportunities enable employees to perform better at their jobs; this in turn is believed to increase the overall organisational performance (Torraco and Swanson, 1995). Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley (2000) discuss various ways that can help practitioners understand the range of options for operating in increasingly complex practice situations. The focus is on whether HRD, as an organisational activity, should promote performance or learning (Barrie and Pace, 1998). Some of the questions address whether HRD practices should be concerned with the recognition of employees (Holton, 1995), or should they, as suggested by Rummler and Brache (1995, in Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley, 2000), focus on business needs and corporate goals.

On the matter of performance management, some scholars argue that tying rewards to performance management can generate a sense of over-entitlement among employees and potentially trigger misconduct when expectations are not met (Werbel and Balkin, 2010). Other scholars assume that compensation changes should flow from performance management systems (Ferner and Almond, 2013; van Vijfeijken, Kleingeld, van Tuijl, Algera and Thierry, 2006). According to Garavan, Gunnigle & Morley (2000), the potential of organisational learning processes needs to meet both performance and learning objectives. They further present three distinct theoretical perspectives.

Firstly, they present the capabilities-driven HRD perspective. It has its base in modern theories of organisational capabilities; it states that human resources can be used as sources of competitiveness. Specifically, it is stated that properly developed human resources can make significant contributions to the overall organisational performance (ibid). It further highlights two vital dimensions of human resources: their value and uniqueness. This perspective posits that an organisation’s internal capabilities can serve as a source of competitive advantage (Guthrie and Datta, 1998), since distinctive human resource practices shape the core competencies that determine how firms compete (Cappelli & Crocker-Hefter, 1996).

Secondly, they present the ‘psychological contract’; it is concerned with the employee-employer expectations and it considers the importance of HRD in influencing and handling this implicit contract (Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley, 2000). Historically, the employee-employer relationship has been viewed as a “wage- work bargain” according to Peck (1994, in Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley, 2000);
however, additional dimensions have come to characterise this relationship, most notably regarding features that go beyond the wage-work economic transaction (Clark and Payne, 1997). The ‘psychological contract’ stipulates that the employee-employer relationship incorporates both economic and psychological dimensions. The psychological dimensions refer to a set of implicit beliefs by both parties, regarding their expectations on one- another, specifically in the workplace (Rousseau, 1995).

Thirdly, they present a perspective that is concerned with the learning organisation, focusing on organisational level learning (Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley, 2000). However, there are multiple definitions of what organisational learning is and what it should include, in order to improve performance (Leitch, Harrison, Burgoyne and Blantern, 1996). Traditional takes on HRD activities have very much been concerned with individual learning; however, there has recently been a change and now focus is more placed on the organisation as a unit of improving and transferring knowledge (ibid). According to West (1994), learning is a valuable and continuous process with no beginning and end. Nevis, Dibella & Gould Jr. (1995) further state that learning is a systems-level phenomenon because it stays within the organization, even if individuals change. The role of HRD is to create an environment that enables the organisation to create effective learning capabilities (Shaw and Perkins, 1991).

Ellström (2010) further states that it is complicated to define organisational learning. He presents four dimensions along which many definitions vary. These are the individual-, group-, organisational and inter-organisational level of analysis. Other scholars, like Gherardi and Nicolini (2001, in Ellström 2010) claim that organisational learning is seen as a mechanism and a methodology of control that aims to discipline members of the organisation.

2.1.3 Previous research summary
Subchapter 2.1 has been concerned with previous research in the field of performance management. Performance appraisal trends have been presented. These include recognising the importance of social and motivational aspects (Fletcher, 2001); the trend in abandoning ratings and putting short-term goals in place (Rock and Jones, 2015); the use of 360-degree feedback (Fletcher, 2011; London and Smither, 1995); diversity and information technology (Smith, Dugan & Trompenaars, 1996). Further, the role (McLagan, 1989) and capability (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007) of
HRD to enhance organisational performance has been highlighted. Organisations that offer a variety of learning opportunities to their employees are said to perform better (Torraco and Swanson, 1995). Also, there is a debate as to whether HRD as an organisational activity should promote performance or learning (Barrie and Pace, 1998).

Three theoretical perspectives by Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley (2000) have been presented. These are concerned with capabilities-driven HRD; the ‘psychological contract’ between the employer and employee, and the concept of the learning organisation.

Research shows that there are scholars supporting the benefits of using multiple raters of performance as suggested by Fletcher (2001). However, studies show that managers often lack skills, or they do not take the opportunity to provide performance feedback effectively (Nankervis and Compton, 2006). It is believed that training can aid in this matter (ibid); especially when it comes to communication skills that are necessary for coaching (Werner, 2017).

Attempting to understand what elements of the performance appraisals are important to the managers at the Organisation, it can be of interest to look at how updated the Organisation is with these performance appraisal trends. Also, it can be of interest to see whether the Organisation promotes learning or performance. This is further elaborated on in chapter 5. Discussion.

2.2 Theoretical framework
Various scholars have presented promising and useful frameworks for understanding how performance management can lead to improved performance (Pritchard et al., 2008). The theoretical framework constituting this paper is to a large extent informed by a study conducted by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013). This study has been chosen to serve as a theoretical framework in this paper for several reasons. Firstly, it is concerned with how various characteristics of the performance management system impact on the overall effectiveness of the performance management system. This concern is in line with the research question that guides this paper, since it can help in understanding what elements of the performance appraisals constitute effective performance management systems. Secondly, as presented in subchapter 2.1 Previous research, a modern take on performance appraisal is characterised by a recognition of the importance of social and motivational aspects (Fletcher, 2001). Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) depart from three motivational theories in their study: expectancy theory...
(DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006; Buchner, 2007); goal-setting theory (Donovan, 2001) and control theory (Donovan, 2001; Buchner, 2007). Thirdly, as previous research has shown, there is a trend in the continuation of goal-setting, i.e. appraisals ought to focus on achievement against goals and on assessment of competencies (Fletcher, 2001). Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) further encompass this aspect in their study, when they elaborate on the meaning and usefulness of goal-setting theory.

In their study, Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) look at how perceived fairness mediates the relationship between characteristics of the performance management systems. The authors depart from characteristics such as the frequency and length of formal reviews, the frequency of informal reviews and feedback, formal performance review focus, and the degree of employee participation. Their quantitative study includes 3192 employees in Belgium. Results show that performance review focus and employee participation strongly relate to perceptions of appraisal fairness. The results also show that the frequency of informal performance reviews is stronger related to performance management system effectiveness than the frequency of formal performance reviews (ibid).

The three performance management system characteristics that are included in the theoretical framework of this paper are: the frequency of formal reviews, the frequency of informal reviews and feedback, and formal performance review focus (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). Findings show that the frequency of informal performance reviews and feedback is more strongly related to performance management system effectiveness, than the frequency of formal performance reviews (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). Therefore, this paper will not look at the length of formal performance reviews. Rather, it will explore how managers at the Organisation perceive the frequency of formal performance reviews and the frequency of informal performance reviews and feedback, to be of importance to them when conducting performance appraisals. Further, since this paper is concerned with studying a managerial population, the performance management characteristic of employee participation will be modified. Instead of looking at whether employee participation in goal-setting is associated with greater employee goal understanding (Erez, Earley and Hulin, 1985), or if employee participation is related to increased commitment to the goal (Lawler and Hackman, 1969), this paper will look at whether the managers at the Organisation perceive that they can set relevant goals for
the employees with the help of the planning and development talks. In addition to highlighting the managerial experience, this study will have a qualitative approach, as opposed to the quantitative methods presented in the study Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013). By departing from a similar theoretical framework (except for modifying one of the performance management system characteristics in order to adapt to the unit of analysis), the aspiration is to bring additional insight to the area of performance management by having a qualitative approach. Brown et al. (2019) further stress the need for qualitative research in HRD. Qualitative methods such as cases and interviews enable more in-depth examination of the complexity in performance management system, than self-administered, survey interventions that often dominate the performance management literature (ibid).

2.2.1 Expectancy theory
DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) and Buchner (2007) emphasise expectancy theory as useful in understanding how to improve performance. According them, individuals allocate their energy and time to actions where they hope the consequences of these actions will maximise their satisfaction (ibid).

![Performance Improvement Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Expectancy framework on performance improvement.

Figure 1. is presented in Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013:808).

By managing performance in a way that optimises the link between each connection in the chain, DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) state that performance improvement can be achieved. However, the employees need to know which results will lead to positive evaluations. In order to explain this, goal-setting and control theory need to be addressed (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013).

2.2.2 Goal-setting theory
According to Donovan (2001), the central elements of goal-setting theory are goal-specificity and goal-difficulty; the former aims at making the employees aware of the criteria upon which they will be assessed. The
latter aims at exploiting employees’ abilities to the greatest extent possible (Buchner, 2007). However, according to Locke and Latham (2002), the extent to which there is regular feedback regarding the congruence between the actual results and the result standards moderates the extent to which goals affect performance. To understand this, control theory needs to be addressed (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013).

2.2.3 Control theory

According to control theory, the more frequently individuals are able to compare their results with result standards, the better they will be able to live up to those standards and this ought to result in positive evaluations (Donovan, 2001). In performance management terms, this means that if employees receive continuous feedback, the performance is expected to be compared to employees that only receive feedback during annual performance reviews (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). According to Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013:809): “…the main purpose of supervisory feedback from a control theory perspective is to enable individuals to self-regulate their actions according to the result standards”.

2.2.4 Performance management system characteristics

Based on expectancy theory, goal-setting theory and control theory, Dewettink and van Dijk (2013) developed a model in which perceived fairness mediates the relationship between characteristics of the performance management systems and their perceived effectiveness by employees. The performance management system characteristics presented by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) that will be used for the purposes of this paper are: the frequency of formal reviews, the frequency of informal reviews and feedback and formal performance review. The fourth performance management system characteristic presented by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013), employee participation in goal setting, will be looked at from a managerial perspective. The managers at the Organisation will be asked about whether they perceive that they can set relevant goals for their employees with the help of the P&D talks. The performance management system characteristic of employee participation is hence modified to suit the unit of analysis, namely the managers.

The first performance management system characteristic, formal performance reviews, is defined as a pre-scheduled face-to-face meeting between the supervisor and the subordinate; the aim is to reflect on the
employee’s overall performance and development (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). In their study, Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) confirm their hypothesis that the frequency of formal performance reviews is positively related to performance management system effectiveness (ibid).

The second performance management system characteristic presented by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) is concerned with informal performance reviews and feedback. As opposed to the formal performance reviews, the informal performance reviews are unscheduled face-to-face meetings between subordinates and supervisors, in which the subordinate’s performance and development is reviewed (ibid). This performance management system characteristic is included since it is important to stay in frequent contact with the employee; this way, behavioural and timely feedback can be provided to the employees in regular interactions (Roberts, 2003).

The third performance management system characteristic included by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) is formal performance review focus. According to research, there are different approaches to human resource management: soft vs hard (Guest, 1987); development vs. result oriented (Dewettinck, 2008). These differentiations are expressions of an underlying theoretical discussion that questions whether the focus should be placed on human or resource (Truss, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, McGovern, Stiles, 1997). Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) confirmed their hypothesis that performance reviews that focus more on employee development are associated with higher levels of performance management system effectiveness, than performance reviews that focus predominantly on performance outcomes. This paper further seeks to explore whether the managers at the Organisations can be said to focus more on employee development or performance outcomes.

The fourth performance management system characteristic, employee participation, will be modified to suit the unit of analysis, i.e. the managers. It will look at whether the managers perceive that they can set relevant goals for their employees.

Since three of these performance management system characteristics have been confirmed to have an impact on the performance management system effectiveness in a study conducted by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013), they will be used to explore what elements of the P&D talks are important to managers at the Organisation. However, the author of this paper embraces additional performance management characteristics that might appear during the interviews with the interviewees. These three performance management characteristics
should by no means be thought of as exhaustive; rather, they should serve as a theoretical framework that guides the understanding of what elements are important to managers at the Organisation.

2.2.5 Theoretical framework summary

Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) apply three motivational theories when attempting to understand how specific performance management system characteristics impact overall performance management system effectiveness.

The first theory is expectancy theory. It assumes that individuals allocate their energy and time to actions where they hope the consequences of these actions will maximise their satisfaction. The employees need to know which results will lead to positive evaluations (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006; Buchner, 2007).

The second theory is goal-setting theory. Two central elements of goal-setting theory are goal-specificity and goal-difficulty; these have been found to have a positive impact on performance (Donovan, 2001; Buchner, 2007).

The third theory is control theory. It states that the more frequently individuals are able to compare their results against result standards, the better they will be able to live up to these standards. It is thought that more frequent feedback to the employees will yield better results (Donovan, 2001).

Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) have developed a model in which they explore characteristics of performance management systems and their perceived effectiveness by employees (ibid). Since this paper is concerned with the elements of the performance appraisals that are important to managers at the Organisation, the characteristic of employee participation is modified to suit the unit of analysis. The three other performance management system characteristics are included since they, according to the study conducted by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013), have a positive impact on performance management system effectiveness. These characteristics are: frequency of formal performance reviews, the frequency of informal performance reviews and feedback, and formal performance review focus.

Additionally, the author of this paper wishes to highlight that not all scholars share this view of the presented theories. There are those who claim that it is difficult to separate goal-setting from establishing performance expectation; employees need to have adequate and unambiguous information regarding performance expectation (Biron,
Farndale, & Paauwe, 2011). Also, a perspective that has not been widely discussed in the theory chapter is concerned with team dynamics; according to Chen, Wu and Leung (2011), an individualistic focus within performance management has negative effects on team dynamics. On a positive note, there are those who support the belief that there are merits of breaking long-term goals into short-term goals (Brown and McCracken, 2010; Locke and Latham, 2013).

When discussing the importance of feedback, it is however confirmed by other scholars that effective performance management systems encourage regular and ongoing feedback through both formal and informal processes (Baker, 2010). Combining guidance for improvement with explicit, detailed and constructive feedback on goal-progress is said to be a great motivator (Latham and Locke, 2006).
3. METHOD
This chapter presents the nature of qualitative research, defines a case-study, explains how the interviewees were identified and how the data was collected and analysed. Further, ethical considerations are accounted for. The method limitations are presented in 5.2 Discussion on method.

3.1 The nature of qualitative research
In qualitative research, the relationship between theory and research is viewed inductively, i.e. theory is generated out of research. Its epistemological position is described to be interpretivist, meaning the researcher focuses “on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2008:366). The ontological position of qualitative research is characterized as constructionist, meaning that “social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals” (ibid).

The purpose of qualitative research is to discover and construct the quality in the research, as opposed to quantitative studies that aim at quantifying results (Jensen, 1991). Since the identified research gap that guides this paper is concerned with the elements of the performance appraisal process that are important to managers, it seems appropriate to have a qualitative approach. Merriam (1988) further states that qualitative studies focus on meaning and context; this also makes the qualitative approach suitable for studying people and their perceptions of reality (ibid). Brown et al. (2019) stress the need for qualitative research in HRD, since qualitative methods enable more in-depth examination of the complexity in performance management systems.

3.2 Literature search
When searching for the literature that came to constitute chapter 2. THEORY, the author of this paper turned to the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature, namely Scopus. In order to access as recent previous research as possible, the period of 2009 – 2019 was chosen as a criteria. Further, the author specifically searched for review articles, that had been cited at least ten times. The number of citations was not chosen for any other reason than to avoid including review articles that had not been cited at all. The chosen keywords were performance management, human resource management, and human resource development. The keywords were chosen as to reflect the purpose and research question of this paper. Three review articles were
selected as a basis for the chapter 2. THEORY. These were: “A Review of Human Resource Development Trends and Practices in Australia: Multinationals, Locals and Responses to Economic Turbulence” by McGraw (2014). This review article was included in 2.1 Previous research since it presents a review on current trends in the area of human resource development that could be fruitful for understanding the context in which research on performance management operates today.

The second review article that was used as a basis for 2.2. Theoretical framework was “Linking Belgian employee performance management system characteristics with performance management system effectiveness: exploring the mediating role of fairness”, by Dewettink and van Dijk (2013). This review article was included to inspire the theoretical framework of this paper since previous research stresses that it is of interest to understand which parts of the performance management system are vital for properly managing performance (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006). Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013) look at how various performance management system characteristics link to overall performance management system effectiveness; therefore it is relevant to the purpose and research question of this study.

The third review article was: “Performance Management: A Scoping Review of the Literature and an Agenda for Future research” by Brown, O’Kane, Mazumdar and McCracken (2019). This review article did not meet the criteria of being cited at least ten times. It might be because it is very recent, from 2019. However, it provides a scoping review of performance management literature over a period of more than 11 years. It further uncovers 230 articles from 41 different journals. Since this review article presents up-to-date, thorough research on performance appraisals in particular, it was seen as highly relevant for the purposes of this study. Therefore, it was included in chapter 2. THEORY, even though it did not meet the citation criteria.

These review articles were used as sources of information for the author of this paper. With the help of these review articles, the author of this paper consulted the original source in almost all cases. Those very few cases in which the author did not consult the original source are indicated throughout the text. Most often this was the case when the author of this paper could not access or find the original source.
3.3 Case-study design
Conducting a case study means analysing a single case in a detailed and intensive manner. This can be the study of a single community, school, family, organization, person or event. In a case study, the case is the object of interest and the researcher’s role is to offer a deeper understanding of it. A distinctive characteristic of a case-study is the researcher’s concern to elucidate unique features of the case. This is known as an idiographic approach. This approach is common in qualitative studies and it includes features such as subjective experiences of the interviewees (Bryman, 2008).

Yin (2006) states that a case study requires a well-defined unit to be in the focus of the study, like an institution or an organisation. Then, a case-study will be useful for the purpose of contributing with knowledge to a particular phenomenon within an organisation. For the purposes of this paper, one specific organisation was chosen, namely the Organisation. Then, a specific context was identified. The specificity of the context is characterised by three criteria.

The first criteria is concerned with studying the performance appraisal process, specifically with what elements of the performance appraisal process are vital for properly managing performance (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006). This criteria is further strengthened by previous research, since previous research stresses the need for learning more about effective configuration of performance management systems (Pritchard et al., 2008). To meet this criteria, performance appraisals (or P&D talks) are studied at the Organisation.

The second criteria concerns the choice of the unit of analysis, i.e. the managers. Previous research stresses that first-line managers have a crucial role in shaping performance management processes within organisations, and that it is key to maximally involve them and support them in managing performance management activities (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). At the Organisation, the managers are conducting performance appraisals with the employees, therefore the managers at the Organisation are particularly suitable for this study.

Thirdly, the Organisation has expressed a need in further exploring opportunities that might guide them in their future design of the performance management process.

Conclusively, the case this paper is examining is concerned with the specific elements of the performance appraisal process that are important to managers that conduct P&D talks with the employees, in an
organisation that has explicitly sought after input for a re-design of the current performance management process.

3.4 The sampling process
The first step in a case-study is to define and to limit the case. Then, it needs to be decided who should be included in the study (Merriam, 1988). For the purposes of qualitative studies, the intent is not to generalise results; thus, it is customary to use non-probability sampling (ibid). Specifically, convenience sampling was used in this study; since it is available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman, 2008). According to Bryman (2008), social research is frequently based on convenience sampling (ibid). The greatest advantage of using convenience sampling includes it being less time consuming and it is therefore an economic way of sampling (ibid). However, a negative aspect of using non-probability sampling includes the results not being generalisable (Merriam, 1988). The contact person at the Organisation had reached out to managers at the Organisation, asking them if they would be willing to participate in this study. Managers were included in the study based on availability, no other criteria was applied. The author of this paper was then given contact information from the contact person at the Organisation, to the managers at the Organisation that had agreed to participate in the study. Further, since the purpose and research question that guides this paper are concerned with the elements of the performance appraisals that are important to managers, it was not of interest to apply any other criteria to the sample than that the included managers are managers who conduct performance appraisals with the employees.

The interviews with the managers at the Organisation were conducted in a ten-day period, 5th – 15th of April 2019. In total, eight interviewees participated in the study; five men and three women. Given the framework of conditions, such as limited time and resources, including eight interviewees was regarded as sufficient for the purposes of this paper.

The interviewees were between 30 – 54 years of age. Their working life at the Organisation was between 9-33 years. Their managerial experience at the Organisation varied from 2.5 to 20 years. The number of employees the interviewees were in charge of varied from 7-29 employees. These figures show that some of the interviewees included in this study have a significant professional experience at the company, both
in terms of how long they have been employed but also in terms of how long they have been holding a managerial position.

The managers that agreed to participate in the study were contacted by email (five out of eight); the remaining three managers were contacted by phone. This is because the author of this paper was given the e-mail addresses to five managers, and the phone-numbers to the other three managers. After an initial contact with the managers, an interview session was scheduled.

3.5 Data collection
The data collection method that was decided most appropriate was qualitative interviewing; this is because the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to create an understanding of the interviewees’ experiences. According to Yin (2006), interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case studies. In case studies, it is further seen as an advantage if the interview bears resemblance to a regular conversation (ibid). Howitt further (2013) further stresses the importance of including open-ended questions so the interviewees can respond freely about their own perspective.

3.5.1 The interview guide
The interview guide, which can be found in 7.2 Appendix 2- Interview questions, was created with regard to the purpose and research question guiding this study. It came to consist of 24 questions in total. The 24 questions were then grouped into ten sections, depending on the nature of the question; e.g. all questions relating in some way to the template that is being used during the performance appraisals, came to constitute one section.

The four performance management system characteristics identified in 2.2 Theoretical framework, came to constitute the basis of the interview guide. The first identified performance management system characteristic, frequency of formal performance reviews, is represented in section three in the interview guide. Here, the interviewees answer questions on the purpose and frequency of the formal performance review.

The second performance management system characteristic, frequency of informal reviews and feedback, is addressed in section five in the interview guide. Here, the interviewees answer questions on whether they perform any follow-up talks on the performance appraisals, and what the focus is during these talks. The second performance
management system characteristic, frequency of informal reviews and feedback, is also addressed in section eight, where the managers are asked about what effect the performance appraisals have on them and their employees.

The third identified performance management system characteristic, formal review focus, is addressed in section two. The questions in this section are concerned with the content of the performance appraisals, what they mean to the managers, the types of questions that can be discussed and performance evaluation.

The fourth identified performance management system characteristic, goal-setting from a managerial perspective, is addressed in section seven. Here, the managers are asked whether the performance appraisals aid them in creating relevant goals for their employees.

The first section in the interview guide was created to introduce the reader to the interviewees. It posits questions regarding the professional background of the interviewees. It was included to give the reader a wider picture of who the interviewees are.

Further, and as mentioned in 1.3 Purpose and research question, it is key to support managers in managing performance management activities (Dewettinck and Van Dijk, 2013). For this reason, the author of the paper wished to ask the interviewees whether they perceive that they have the support they need in managing performance management activities. These questions are asked in section six.

Also, in 1.2 Problem area, it is stated that the Organisation uses a common template to serve as a guideline for the managers during the performance appraisals. The author of this paper has further included questions on the template in section four.

Finally, section ten has been included to ask the interviewees which other aspects they would like to discuss or highlight, regarding the performance appraisals. These questions were included since Howitt (2013) stresses the importance of including open-ended questions so the interviewees can respond freely about their own perspective.

All interviewees were asked the same questions but not necessarily in the same order. This is because some interviewees answered questions that would appear later in the interview guide; the questions they had answered prior to being asked were not repeated to the interviewees again.
3.5.2 Data collection tool
The interviews took place on Skype; Skype was chosen since it is a time efficient and financially affordable tool. According to research, it: “works well as a viable alternative or complementary data collection tool for qualitative researchers”. It is also stressed that so called VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technologies (such as Skype and FaceTime) “offer new opportunities “and should “be embraced with confidence” (Lo Iacono, Symonds & Brown, 2016). However, there are those that are critical to Skype as a data collection tool. Seitz (2015) states that personal topics such as online dating experiences or abuse, make participants more diffident about being interviewed on Skype; it appears to be more difficult to obtain in-depth responses to sensitive questions via Skype. For the purposes of this paper, the interviewees were not asked very personal or sensitive questions, rather they were asked about their personal opinion of them as professionals in a work-related setting. In addition to using Skype as the data collection tool, a separate mobile phone was used to record the interviews.

3.6 Data analysis
Compared to the analysis of quantitative data, qualitative data has not reached the same level of codification or analytic procedures. However, there are writers that argue that this is undesirable anyway (Bryman, 2008).

For the purposes of this paper, all interviews were conducted in Swedish via Skype. They were then recorded, transcribed word by word and translated to English. The interviewees were then given other names, as to anonymise them.

Since this paper set out to understand what elements of the performance appraisals system are important to managers at the Organisation, thematic analysis was chosen. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns of meaning (or "themes") within data. Further, it is an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. However, this is also a limitation of thematic analysis, since it makes developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis difficult (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The data analysis of this paper follows the six phases of thematic analysis as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases are:

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data
Phase 2: Generating initial codes
Phase 3: Searching for themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
Phase 6: Producing the report

Firstly, the author of this paper was familiarised with the data by transcribing and re-reading the transcripts multiple times. Then the initial coding took place when the author of this paper coded the answers of the interviewees, based on phenomena that was described in a similar way by the interviewees. Quotations that represented themes were copy-pasted into a word-document, and grouped with similar statements. In this way, six themes were created, as to answer the research question on what elements of the performance appraisal process are important to managers at the Organisation. These six themes are: trustfulness; regularity; feedback; psychosocial aspects; support and measurement. Chapter 4. Results presents these six themes. Chapter 5. Discussion presents a discussion on the findings around two overarching themes that were created based on these six themes. These are: people-specific elements and system-specific elements. The term people-specific elements refers to elements of the performance appraisals that the managers have described as important to them in relation to people, i.e. the employees. The people-specific elements are trustfulness, regularity, feedback and psychosocial aspects.

The term system-specific elements refers to elements of the performance appraisals that the managers have described as important to them in relation to the system, i.e. the Organisation. The system-specific elements are support and measurement.

When analysing the data, i.e. the transcripts, the author of this paper identified two types of elements that appeared to be important to the managers. These were the elements that are concerned with the relationship the managers had with the employees, and the relationship the managers had with the Organisation. These two types of elements came to constitute the people-specific and system-specific elements. The author of this paper does not consciously depart from any theory or other inspiration when deciding on naming these elements people- and system-specific. Rather, this way of labelling the elements stems from the data and the author’s analysis of the data.
3.7 Ethical considerations
There are ethics codes and laws that regulate and place ethical demands on the research process. Diener and Crandall (1978, in Bryman, 2008) have categorized the following main areas of ethical consideration: whether there is harm to participants; whether there is a lack of informed consent; whether there is an invasion of privacy and whether deception is involved.

3.7.1 Harm to participants
This area entails several factors, however Diener and Crandall (1978, in Bryman, 2008) agree on physical harm or harm to the participant’s development, stress, and loss of self-esteem as the main ones. However, another challenge of qualitative research involves participants of studies not being identifiable, i.e. to take particular care as a researcher regarding the identification of persons and places (ibid). In this study, all the interviewees were anonymised; their names do not appear on the transcripts and the recordings were deleted after the transcription took place. This was to ensure that the interviewees would not be identifiable, and that their participation in the study would not in any way be harmful to them.

3.7.2 Informed consent
This principle stipulates that the participants of a study have the right to receive as much information as possible, regarding, among other things, the true purpose of the study. This is to enable the participants to make informed decision about their participation. One way of doing this is giving the participants an informed consent form (ibid). The interviewees at the Organisation received an informed consent form prior to the interview. The informed consent form can be found in 7.1 Appendix 1. It explains the purpose of the study in broad terms: that the interviewees’ participation is voluntary, that they can terminate the interview whenever they want and that they will be anonymised. Also, it states that the interviewees will receive a summary of the interview per e-mail, which they will have to approve. The interviewees also learnt that the recordings of the interviews would be deleted and that the results of this study would be available to them once this paper had been completed.
3.7.3 Privacy
This principle is linked to the lack of informed consent and to issues on anonymity and confidentiality in the research process. Personal information should be confidential (ibid); therefore, the interviewees at the Organisation learnt prior to the interview that they would be anonymised, and that the data generated from the interviews would be used only by the author of this paper, for the explained purposes of this study.

3.7.4 Deception
As the word suggests, deception in the research process means presenting the study or purpose of the study, as something else than it really is (ibid). Since the aim of the study at the Organisation was to understand what elements of the performance appraisals are important to the managers, it was straightforward and uncomplicated to inform them about the purpose of the study with the help of the informed consent form.
4. RESULTS
The research question that guides this paper is: What elements of the performance appraisals are important to managers at the Organisation? In order to address this question, this chapter presents the main findings generated from the interviews with the managers at the Organisation. Six themes are presented below, without priority. These themes are: trustfulness; regularity; feedback; psychosocial aspects; support and measurement. The interviewees were encouraged to highlight other aspects related to the P&D talks, that had not been addressed during the interviews. These other aspects are presented at the end of the chapter, together with a summary of the results.

4.1 Trustfulness
The managers at the Organisation were asked about what the P&D talks contain; what the P&D talks mean to them as managers and whether they can discuss sensitive topics with the employees. Results show that the interviewees follow the template provided for the P&D talks, to various degrees. The interviewees state that they discuss topics suggested by the template, such as: reflecting on the past year, well-being, work-life balance, the working environment, clarity in role, what the next step is in the development of the employee, teamwork, feedback, the individual development plant, motivation, psychosocial aspects and employee goals.

It can therefore be said that the managers at the Organisation let the template provided for the P&D talks act as guidelines during the P&D talks.

Half of the interviewees stated that the P&D talk is important to them, using the words “extremely important”, “of great importance” and “important”. A minority of the interviewees claim that the P&D talks are crucial when it comes to developing the employee. A minority of the interviewees stated that continuous assessment meetings (swe. avstämnningar) are more important to them than the P&D talks, since the P&D talks take place on an annual basis. One interviewee expressed that the P&D talks are “pretty” important, another stated that the P&D talks becomes a complementary summary if the manager has a continuous dialogue with the employee throughout the year.

Therefore, it can be said that the managers at the Organisation find the P&D talks to be important to various degrees, with some claiming that it is a tool for developing employees, and other stress the importance of continuous assessment meetings over P&D talks.
A vast majority of the interviewees expressed that they could discuss sensitive topics during the P&D talks; only one stated that she uses the assessment meetings, not P&D talks, to discuss sensitive topics. One interviewee stated that there should not be any surprises for the employees, during the P&D talks; sensitive topics need to be discussed throughout the year. A vast majority of the managers stressed honesty and trust as important components for creating a good dialogue with the employees, which would in turn enable a conversation on sensitive topics. However, one interviewee stated that trust is not created during the P&D talks; rather, it is created in the operational activities throughout the year. Another interviewee stated that he wished his employees trusted him, so they feel that they can discuss sensitive topics with him. Only one interviewee expressed that he does not feel that the feedback “works great”, since he himself finds it challenging to be upfront an honest with his own manager.

Thus, it can be said that the managers at the Organisation can discuss sensitive topics with their employees, but that there must be a certain level of trust and honesty between the managers and their employees. This trust in turn is not built in the P&D talks but throughout the year.

4.2 Regularity
The interviewees were asked whether they follow-up on the P&D talks and how often, according to them, P&D talks should take place. A minority of the interviewees stated that they have follow-up meetings on the P&D talks every six months. Half of interviewees stated that they have assessment meetings every week or every other week. A minority of the interviewees claimed that they do not have scheduled assessment or follow-up meetings, rather they “deal” with things as they occur, stating that this is an area of improvement for them. One of these interviewees expressed that he manages to have follow-up talks once a year in the best case, because of the nature of his work and the difficulty to pull employees out of the production lines as often as he would have liked too. A vast majority of the interviewees responded that the employees set the agenda for the follow-up meetings. During these meetings the managers look at the employees’ individual development plans, balance, well-being, in order to provide a continuous support to the employees.

In general, it can be said that the managers at the Organisation
either conduct follow-up meetings on the P&D talks every six months, or weekly assessment meetings, or both of these, or neither. However, the interviewees that stated that they do not conduct follow-up or assessment meetings, admitted that this was an area of improvement for them.

Further, most of the interviewees were satisfied with conducting the P&D talks once a year; these managers also expressed that conducting P&D talks once a year required either follow-up meetings every six months, or continuous assessment meetings, as a complement to the annual P&D talks. A minority of the interviewees wished to have the P&D talks twice a year; one of them expressed confidence in the HR department and stated that she believed today’s frequency of the P&D talks has been precisely calculated. Only one interviewee had no opinion on the frequency. He stated that it was the responsibility of the team to make sure every team member was developing.

Thus, it can be said that most of the interviewees were satisfied with conducting the P&D talks on an annual basis, in combination with follow-up or assessment meetings. This is because these more regular meetings with the employees were thought of as more valuable to most of the interviewees, compared to annual P&D talks.

4.3 Feedback
The interviewees were asked whether they perceive that the P&D talks contribute to their development, as well as the effect the P&D talks have on them and their employees. A majority of the interviewees answered “absolutely”, when asked if the P&D talks contribute to their development as a manager; the remaining interviewees used the word “yes”. Half of the interviewees stated that the feedback they receive from their employees was the main contributor to their development.

Yes, partly it is relationship and trust building. Often, I perceive that after these talks [P&D] I can speak more openly with my employees

Martin

One interviewee stated that she learns a lot just by talking to the employees and that these conversations aid her in her own career development. Other interviewees stated:

Yes, absolutely, I receive feedback from my subordinates in every P&D talk… regarding how to improve the structure of the meetings and so forth. Individual development for me… and organisational development. I would like to say that it is very important.

Tom
I want them to teach me how to become better if there is something that I am doing, that is not working as it should.

Stefan

The interviewees can be said to value the P&D talks greatly when it comes to assessing the extent to which the P&D talks contribute to their development, especially when it comes to the feedback the managers receive from the employees. All interviewees claimed that the feedback they receive during the P&D talks contribute to their development.

When asked about the effect the P&D talks have on them and their employees, one interviewee answered:

P&D talks have a great impact on what employees think of their employer, their job and their own development

Tom

Another interviewee stated that the P&D talks have a positive effect on her and her employees, since they (the P&D talks) create a calm when the manager and the employee agree on goals for the employee.

4.4 Psychosocial aspects
The interviewees were asked about their opinion on the template provided for guiding the P&D talks, as well as their suggestions for additional subjects to be added to the template/to be discussed more. The results show that a majority of the interviewees found the template to be a useful basis for the P&D talks. A minority of the interviewees claimed that it was too controlling and heavy; perhaps good for a new manager but that they could use a slimmed version. One interviewee stated:

It [the template] is structured in sections, so you ask four questions and then comes a feedback section. If the dialogue and the feedback had been integrated in every question, then I think it would have been more dynamic

Martin

The interviewees suggested the following topics to be added/to be more discussed: the meaningfulness of work, i.e. if the employee understands why he/she is doing what he/she is doing; questions of psychosocial character; the relationship between the manager-employee; performance management and performance reviews; career development (swe. karriärvägar). One of the interviewees that suggested career development to be added to the template stated that this topic often appears when the
employees are asked to add something else than what has been discussed in the P&D talks (swe. övrigt-punkt). The same interviewee claimed that he believes that the employees might feel that there are no natural ways of career development. One of the interviewees that highlighted meaningfulness of work to be added to the template, also stressed the importance of the employees having fun at work and feeling committed to their tasks.

A minority of the interviewees did not think anything needed to be added to the template.

4.5 Support
According to Dewettinck and Van Dijk (2013), it is key to support managers in managing performance management activities. Therefore, managers were asked whether they feel that they have necessary tools to conduct successful P&D talks, and they were asked to describe what a successful P&D talk was. Half of the interviewees stated that they either had the necessary tools to conduct successful P&D talks, or that they had been given these tools at the beginning of their managerial career. One interviewee, having a relatively short experience as a manager, stated that she would like to receive feedback from the HR department upon conducting P&D talks with her employees.
Two other interviewees stated that:

It would be helpful to talk proactively to other managers, regarding how they conduct P&D talks. What questions are we facing? What are the difficulties in conducting P&D talks? It does not have to be a discussion on specific employees, rather on the method and process.... soft values are missing.

Anna

When I started as a manager, I received training in conducting P&D talks. ...but I still was not ready. I promised a bit too much [to the employees]. It took a few years to find a good level, to be confident.

Martin

One interviewee said that she does not need support anymore, but that “half-good” e-learnings are available.

It can be said that the interviewees in general perceive that they have the necessary tools to conduct successful P&D talks, however a minority of the interviewees expressed a need for additional support from the HR department, and an interest in talking proactively to other managers about the difficulties the managers face in the P&D process. A
minority of the interviewees stated that a successful P&D talk has energy, and many of them stressed the importance of knowing what the next step was going to be:

To have a mutual dialogue...to make it clear what my expectations are on the employee. A successful talk includes openness and honesty, and to have agreed on a number of activities that are going to develop the employee

Anna

A majority of the interviewees used the words “openness”, and “honesty”, when attempting to describe what a successful P&D talk is. The interviewees can in general be said to value when employees speak their minds.

4.6 Measurement

The interviewees were asked whether they perform any type of performance evaluation during the P&D talks, as well as what they think of the pay review being separated from the P&D talk. Also, the managers were asked whether it was possible for them to create relevant goals for the employees with the help of the P&D talks, as well as if the P&D talks help them in identifying competency gaps.

A minority of the interviewees stated that they perform some type of performance evaluation in the P&D talk; this usually contained parameters such as whether the employee had exceeded or underperformed. Further, topics on quality, quantity, and communication were discussed as part of performance evaluation. One interviewee could measure performance at an individual level, due to the nature of his work (production).

Another interviewee expressed:

No, I do not conduct any type of performance evaluation. As in: This you did good, this you could have done better. Is that what you mean? No, there are no good ways of doing that at the Organisation... It is still quite soft. Quite fluffy.

Kevin

When asked about their opinion on P&D talks being separated from the pay reviews, a majority of interviewees stated that they think these talks should remain separate. One of them states:

There are pros and cons with this, and I understand why these talks have been separated. It would be very easy to focus too much on the salary, if these talks would
merge. At the same time, it is hard not to talk, or to completely let go of the salary discussion, since we are discussing performance anyway.

Stefan

One interviewee stated that the pay review takes place in spring, but since the P&D talks are supposed to take place once a year, it can happen that the pay review and P&D talks coincide:

The system is a bit limp...there is no strong schematic connection between these talks. I find that to be a bit of a shame

Tom

The last interviewee stated that there is no performance evaluation in the salary discussion for production employees; rather this type of evaluation takes place in the P&D talks.

When the interviewees were asked about setting employee goals, one of the interviewees expressed that he was sceptical to employee goals; he stressed the importance of setting team goals. A minority of the interviewees stated that they can create relevant goals for their employees based on the P&D talks. Another interviewee stated:

I always found this very (swe.jäkligt) difficult. If you work in a business that is not super concrete, where you cannot say that you have produced three of this or that...you are working with constant improvements. It is difficult to set that type of quantitative goals. Rather, you set areas of improvement

Stefan

Half the interviewees responded that they can identify competency gaps with the help of the P&D talks. The other half answered that the P&D talks were not assisting them in identifying competency gaps; they stated that they either had access to this information from the continuous assessments meetings, their team leaders or because the nature of their work (IT) was fast-paced and the manager had to act instantaneously if he discovered a competency gap, not wait for the P&D talks to take place:

If we lack competencies, we need to acquire it during the process. This is not something we can postpone or discuss back and forth

Stefan

One of the interviewees stated that her employees sometimes ask her to be guiding them in their development, since they ask questions such as: “What do you think?” The same interviewee perceived that there is a great level of trust in her as a manager, since she is expected to be guiding the employee in his/her development.
4.7 Results summary

The interviewees were encouraged to highlight other aspects related to the P&D talks, that had not been addressed during the interviews. A minority of interviewees did not feel the need to add other aspects. The other interviewees highlighted aspects such as: the template being too generic; malfunctioning crosstalk between managers, i.e. difficulties in following employees’ development after taking over employees; a need for clearer career ladders, a request for increased clarity about roles and their connection to salary; P&D talks being time consuming and time being a scarce commodity.

The results from the interviews show that there are both people-specific and system-specific elements of the performance appraisal process that are important to managers at the Organisation. The people-specific elements are trustfulness, regularity, feedback and psychosocial aspects. The interviewed managers at the Organisation express that the P&D talks are important to them to various degrees. Some claim that it is a good tool for developing employees, other value continuous assessment meetings over P&D talks. Honesty and trust are said to be important components of the P&D talks, since managers stress that these components enable good dialogues and that they open up for a discussion on sensitive topics with the employees. However, there are managers that state that honesty and trust are not built in the P&D talks; rather, continuously throughout the year. Further, the managers have expressed that it is important to them to follow up on the P&D talks, and they do that in different ways with various frequencies and methods. However, there are managers that do not have structured ways of following up on the employees; these managers claim that this is an area of improvement for them. The managers have also stated that the feedback they receive from their employees in the P&D talks represents the main contributor to their own development. However, almost all manager explained that they wished for other topics to be discussed and highlighted during the P&D talks. Most of these topics were concerned with the manager-employee relation, the personal life of the employees and career development.

When looking at the system-specific elements of the performance appraisals that are important to managers at the Organisation, results show that the managers require additional support, more effective tools of measurement and increased clarity. Some request additional support from the HR department upon completing the P&D talks with their employees, as a way of receiving feedback from the HR department.
Other express wishes to talk to other managers proactively about difficulties they face in the P&D process; the idea is to focus on processes not specific people.

Some managers stated that there are no good ways of evaluating performance of at the Organisation, other explained that it was difficult to measure performance because of the nature of their work. Also, when it comes to measurement, only a minority of the interviewees perceived that they could create relevant goals for their employees.
5.DISCUSSION
This chapter is devoted to a discussion on the results and methods of the study. An account is given for the theoretical and empirical contribution, as well as suggestions for future research.

5.1 Discussion on results
The discussion on results centres around people-specific and system-specific elements, since these two types of elements were identified as overarching themes in the data analysis. Also, a discussion is presented on the extent to which these elements support performance or learning.

The results from this study have shown that trust and honesty are important to managers at the Organisation, when it comes to nurturing their relationship with the employees. Even though the majority of the interviewees were satisfied with conducting P&D talks on an annual basis, a great focus was placed on having continuous assessment meetings with the employees. Further, the managers stated that the feedback they received from the employees was the main contributor to their own development.

The managers expressed that they wished to include topics of more personal character in the P&D talks, suggesting that soft values are missing. When it comes to additional support, the managers can in general be said to be satisfied with the support they receive from the Organisation; however, there were interviewees that requested both proactive and reactive feedback on the P&D talks. Only a minority of the interviewees conducted some type of performance evaluation in the P&D talks, and half of the interviewees stated that the P&D talks did not aid them in setting relevant goals for the employees.

5.1.1 People-specific elements
As a result of globalisation, internationalisation has become a pervasive element of business (Buchelt, 2015). Many organisations have realised that the key to competitive advantage is in attracting and maintaining a committed workforce (Crawshaw, Van Dick and Brodbeck, 2012). Performance management is a widely advocated way of managing human resources and developing employees (Cascio, 2014). A performance management system begins with performance appraisal (Aguinis and Pierce, 2008), but there is no ‘best way’ to conduct an appraisal interview, it will be affected by the relationship between the manager and the employee (Klein and Snell, 1994).
This is in line with the finding of this study that trust is an important component of the P&D talks. Managers at the Organisation have expressed that components such as trust and honesty enable good dialogues with the employees. The managers stress that honesty and trust are not built in the P&D talks but continuously throughout the year. Also, the topics the interviewees wished to add to the template were mainly concerned with the relationship between the manager and the employee and questions of more personal character.

These findings suggest that the Organisation might want to consider introducing trust-building activities for the managers and the employees, both inside and outside the scope of the P&D talks; as a way of assisting the managers in creating trustful relationships with their employees.

According to Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013), the frequency of informal performance reviews is stronger related to performance management system effectiveness, than the frequency of formal performance reviews. At the Organisation, most of the interviewees were satisfied with conducting the P&D talks on an annual basis; however, in combination with follow-up or assessment meetings, since these more regular meetings with the employees were thought of as more valuable to most of the interviewees, compared to annual P&D talks. This is in line with Roberts (2003), who states that it is important to stay in frequent contact with the employee, to be able to provide regular and timely feedback. The interviewed managers at the Organisation can be said to prefer more frequent informal meetings with their employees, over the annual P&D talk. Some of the interviewed managers viewed the P&D talks as a complimentary summary if the managers had a continuous dialogue with the employee throughout the year.

This suggests that the Organisation might want to consider abandoning annual performance reviews and long-term goals, to instead adopt short-term goals with an emphasis on ongoing discussions between managers and employees (Rock and Jones, 2015).

While it is important to provide regular and timely feedback to employees (Roberts, 2003), managers too need feedback. The managers at the Organisation expressed that they value the P&D talks greatly when it comes to assessing the extent to which the P&D talks contribute to their development, especially when it comes to the feedback the managers receive from the employees. All interviewees claimed that the feedback they receive during the P&D talks contribute to their development greatly. This highlights the importance of using the P&D talks, or
alternatively more frequent informal performance reviews, as the greatest source of feedback for the managers at the Organisation. If possible, it can be desirable to develop the section(s) in which the managers receive feedback from the employees even more, as to maximise what the managers perceive as the main contribution to their development, namely feedback from the employees.

5.1.2 System-specific elements
Walker and Smither (1999) conducted a study in which they found that managers who discussed feedback with those who had provided it, showed significantly more improvement in ratings than those who did not. One interviewee at the Organisation stated that she would like to receive feedback from the HR department upon conducting P&D talks with her employees. Another interviewee expressed that she would like to discuss more proactively about the challenges she faces in the P&D talks, with other managers.

These findings suggest that perhaps the Organisation could explore even more the matter of additional support the managers need in order to be able to conduct successful P&D talks. Maybe the Organisation can use a survey to ask managers specifically about what help or tools they need in order to be able to conduct successful P&D talks. The Organisation could introduce a trial period where managers can exchange their experiences of difficulties that they face in the P&D talks in seminars, as well as providing feedback to those managers that explicitly require it.

Donovan (2001) states that employees need to know which results will lead to positive evaluations. The employees need to be aware of the criteria upon which they will be assessed, and their abilities need to be exploited to the greatest extent possible (Buchner, 2007). Results from this study show that only a minority of the interviewees feel that they can create relevant goals for their employees with the help of the P&D talks. The interviewees provided reasons such as not believing in goals at individual level, and working in a business where it is very difficult to set quantitative goals. This can be a challenge for the Organisation, if the managers themselves do not perceive that they can set relevant goals for the employees with the help of the P&D talks. In this paper, the fourth performance management characteristic of employee participation in goal-setting was modified to suit the unit of analysis, i.e. the managers. Therefore, no conclusion can be drawn about whether the employees feel that they can participate in the goal-setting. However, results of this study show that only a minority of the interviewed managers perceive that the
P&D talks aid them in setting relevant goals for the employees.

Perhaps the Organisation could consider introducing more concrete criteria upon which the employees will be assessed, in order to exploit employees’ abilities to the greatest extent possible (Buchner, 2007). This might assist both the managers in setting the goals for the employees, but it might also enable the employees to compare their results with result standards. Further, perhaps the Organisation can consider following the trend in scrapping long-term and introducing short-term goals instead. If the focus is on ongoing discussions between managers and employees and short-term goals (Rock and Jones, 2015), perhaps it will take the pressure away of setting quantitative goals in businesses that are perceived by the managers to not be very concrete.

5.1.3 Learning or performance?

There has been a shift in the focus of performance management, one that calls for a more developmental nature of the process. According to Barrie and Pace (1998), there is an ongoing debate whether HRD as an organisational activity should promote performance or learning. Torraco and Swanson (1999) further state that organisations that offer a variety of learning opportunities to their employees perform better. This is confirmed by Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013); they express that performance reviews focusing more on development are associated with higher levels of performance management system effectiveness.

At the Organisation, a minority of the interviewees claimed that the P&D talks serve as a tool to develop employees; the interviewees stressed the importance of continuous assessment meetings over P&D talks. Also, when asked about what the P&D talks contain, the managers responded: reflecting on the past year, well-being, work-life balance, the working environment, clarity in role, what the next step is in the development of the employee, teamwork, feedback, the individual development plant, motivation, psychosocial aspects and employee goals. Further, a minority of the interviewees stated that they perform some type of performance evaluation in the P&D talk. Some even explained that there are no goods ways of conducting performance evaluation at the Organisations, that is it “quite fluffy”.

These findings suggest that P&D talks at the Organisation are more learning than performance oriented. However, according to Garavan, Gunnigle and Morley (2000) the potential of organisational learning processes needs to meet both performance and learning objectives. It seems that the Organisation has a rather soft approach to HRM (Guest,
1987), and that the focus is on human, not resource (Truss et al., 1997). And while only a minority of the interviewees stated that they perform some type of performance evaluation in the P&D talks, only one interviewee wished to add more performance management topics to the P&D template. While the majority of the employees did not explicitly ask for performance evaluation tools, many of them stressed that it is important to know what the next step for the employee is going to be, as well as it being difficult to set measurable goals for the employees with the help of the P&D talks. However, according to Biron, Farndale and Paauwe (2011), it is difficult to separate goal-setting from establishing performance expectation; employees need to have adequate and unambiguous information regarding performance expectation.

Thus, it can be said that the people-specific elements of the performance appraisal process at the Organisation to a greater extent supports learning over performance. However, the system-specific elements might need to be further developed by the Organisation. The managers at the Organisation have expressed various suggestions regarding the tools they would like to have in order to be able to conduct successful performance appraisals. Also, a majority of the managers expressed difficulties in setting relevant goals for their employees, in combination with a lack of tools for evaluating performance, a lack of clarity in career development and system-difficulties in taking over employees.

5.1.4 Theoretical contribution
The research gap this study aimed to make a contribution to was concerned with the parts of the performance management system that are crucial for properly managing performance (DeNisi and Pritchard, 2006). Since managers have been identified as having a pivotal role in the performance management process (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013), this study used managers a units of analysis.

The theoretical implications of this paper support, to a great extent, previous research in the field of performance management.

Firstly, the interviewed manager at the Organisation placed great focus on the relationship they have with their employees, in particular on elements such as trust and honesty being key to having a good relationship with the employees. As Klein and Snell (1994) have showed, performance appraisals will be affected by the relationship the manager has with the employees. However, this paper has contributed with further
understanding of trust and honesty being important elements in the performance appraisals. Also, this paper has highlighted that trust and honesty are built throughout the year, not merely in the performance appraisals.

Secondly, the interviewed managers at the Organisation highly valued continuous assessment meetings and follow-up meetings; many of the interviewed managers preferred these informal meetings over formal annual performance reviews. This is in line with Dewettinck and van Dijk (2013), since they state that the frequency of informal performance reviews relate more strongly to performance management system effectiveness, than the frequency of formal performance reviews.

However, this paper has contributed with a deeper understanding of why managers value continuous assessment meetings over formal performance reviews on an annual basis. Looking at the first theoretical contribution, the managers’ statements on preferring informal performance reviews over annual formal performance reviews, can be seen as an expression of a regard for informal performance reviews as an opportunity to build very important components of the performance appraisals, namely trust and honesty.

Thirdly, the interviewed managers at the Organisation expressed that they value the feedback they receive from the employees to a great extent. Even though this is in line with Roberts (2003), who states that it is important to provide regular and timely feedback; this paper further highlights the feedback as not just very important, but also as the single main contributor to the managers own development.

5.1.5 Implications for the Organisation

The author of this paper set out to explore opportunities that might guide the Organisation in their future design of their performance appraisal process. Even though it might be challenging for the Organisation to translate the findings of this study into the everyday business, the author if this paper still wishes to present a few suggestions that constitute the empirical product of this paper.

The first suggestion is concerned with the managers expressed focus on trust and honesty as important components of the P&D talks. The Organisation might want to consider introducing trust-building activities inside and outside the scope of the P&D talks, as to facilitate the communication between the managers and the employees. Trust itself is
not built in the P&D talks; rather, it should be seen as a constant process that defines the relationship between the manager and the employee.

The second suggestion is concerned with goals. The Organisation might want to consider abandoning annual performance reviews, and adopting short-term goals that facilitates the discussion between the managers and the employees.

The third suggestion is concerned with feedback. According to the managers at the Organisation, the feedback they receive from the employees during the P&D talks is the main contributor to their own development. Perhaps the Organisation wants to consider developing the feedback sections in the template, or introducing more timely feedback in the continuous assessment meetings. If the feedback the managers receive from the employees is the main contributor to their development, then perhaps managers too need to be given this feedback more often than once a year.

The fourth suggestion is concerned with additional support. Some interviewees included in this study gave very concrete examples of what type of support they would like to have, in order to be able to conduct successful P&D talks. The suggestions included proactive discussions with other managers on difficulties the managers were facing in the P&D talks. It also included the HR department providing reactive feedback to managers upon completing the P&D talks. Perhaps the Organisation might want to consider sending out surveys to the managers, asking them about the tools they lack in order to conduct successful P&D talks. The Organisation might perhaps want to organise seminars where managers meet, proactively, so that they can exchange their experiences of the P&D talks.

The fifth suggestion is concerned with measurement tools. The managers included in this study did, to a large extent, find it challenging to set relevant goals for their employees. A suggestion is to provide training for managers that need more guidance in how to set concrete goals in businesses that are not super concrete. This lack of clarity was expressed by some manages when it comes to career development and taking over employees. Perhaps there is a need to clarify both the steps employees take in their career development, and to make the system more transparent so managers that take over employees can follow their development in a structured way.
5.2 Discussion on method
There is a need for qualitative research in HRD, since qualitative methods such as cases and interviews enable more in-depth examination of the complexity in the performance management system (Brown et al., 2019). However, qualitative methods do not allow results to be generalizable to the same extent as quantitative methods (Howitt, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, it was not seen as necessary to be able to generalize the results. According to Merriam (1988), a case-study is particularly suitable when studying the opinion and perspective of individuals. Since this study set out to explore what matters to managers in the performance appraisal process, conducting a case-study to explore opinions and perspectives seemed appropriate.

However, it interesting to reflect on whether the size of the Organisation can be of significance when interpreting the results. Since the Organisation is a large company, interviewing eight managers means including very few managers of the total number of managers. Had the case instead been a small company, where perhaps there only was 15 managers in total, then the meaning of the results would have been different. It would probably be more straightforward to generalise the results than it is now for the Organisation.

Further, since convenience sampling was used, it is interesting to reflect on whether or not the sample was representative of the Organisation. If it is more or less representative of the Organisation as a whole, then the findings are of even greater value to the Organisation. However, if the sample is not representative of the Organisation, then the practical implications for the Organisation are limited.

However, since qualitative studies do not allow for the same level of generalizability of results, as quantitative studies do (Howitt, 2013), due to time and resource limitations, eight interviewees were included in the sample. As far as the author of this paper can see, including a few more interviewees would not have had a significant impact on the results. This is also because Merriam (1988) states that it is the opinion and experience of the interviewee that matters in a case-study; the focus is on the perceived experience by the interviewee (ibid).

According to Yin (2006), interviews are the most important sources of information in case-studies, since the interviewees can freely describe their opinions. For this reason, the author of this paper decided to have interviews as the data collection method. No other data collection method was considered for the purposes of this study. However, that raises the
question of whether the results would have been different, if e.g. the author of this paper had had an ethnographic approach that perhaps would have enabled a thorough and longitudinal study of the units of analysis. Perhaps the results would have been different if the author of this paper had attended a performance appraisal meeting between the managers and the employees.

Also, to avoid being biased towards the Organisation and its needs, the author of this paper met only once with the contact person at the Organisation. The author of this paper has not obtained any financial compensation from the Organisation, or any other benefits that might cloud the author’s impartiality or judgement when conducting this study.

5.2.1 Suggestions for future research

Since this paper set out to understand what elements of the performance appraisals are important to managers, it could be interesting to explore what elements are important to employees as well. If employees were included in a study that sought to understand what elements of the performance appraisals are important to them, it could be conducted with a qualitative approach with the purposes of obtaining in-depth data on their experiences. Alternatively, a quantitative approach could be taken, that includes a greater sample in order to allow for greater generalisability of the findings.

Further, even though this paper was concerned with the unique experiences of the managers at the Organisation, perhaps an ethnographic study, of more observational character could be of interest. This way, the researcher could participate in an even more interactive way with the units of analysis. It might be of great value to sit with the manager and the employee during the performance appraisals.
6. CONCLUSION

The research question that guided this paper was: What elements of the performance appraisals are important to managers at the Organisation?

Result show that trust and honesty are important to managers at the Organisation, when it comes to nurturing their relationship with the employees. The managers stated that the feedback they received from the employees was the main contributor to their own development. The managers also wished to include topics of more personal character in the P&D talks, suggesting that soft values are missing. When it comes to additional support, the managers can in general be said to be satisfied with the support they receive from the Organisation; however, there were interviewees that requested both proactive and reactive feedback on the P&D talks. Also, the interviewees stressed difficulties in goal-setting as well as a need for increased clarity in career development and in taking over employees.

As a recommendation to the Organisation, the author of this paper suggests introducing trust-building activities; scrapping annual performance reviews and replacing them with frequent informal meetings; developing the sections in which the managers receive feedback from the employees; exploring what other additional support managers need through surveys and seminars; introducing more concrete assessment criteria and increased clarity in career development and in taking over employees.
7. REFERENCE LIST


7.1 Appendix 1- The informed consent form

The informed consent form 2019-04-03
Master’s programme in Human Resource Management and Development
Linköping University
P&D talks

Hello,
My name is Emma Mercier.

I am currently a student at the master’s programme in Human Resource Management and Development at Linköping University. Since your employer is conducting working life research together with Linköping University through a multidisciplinary research centre, I wish to interview you for my thesis.

My study seeks to understand how you use P&D talks, what these talks contain, and to get an understanding of what implications, according to you, these talks have.

The study will include respondents from your organisation only, and the interview is expected to take about 30 minutes. The participation is voluntary; you have the right to terminate the interview whenever you want.

Further, the interview will be confidential and anonymous. The data gathered will only be used by me, for the purposes of my master’s thesis. After finishing the study, the results will be available to you. Also, you will receive a summary of the interview, for validity purposes.

The interview will be recorded; however, the recordings will be deleted after the interviews have been transcribed.

Please do not hesitate to ask questions if there are any.
I am very thankful for your participation,

Emma Mercier
7.2 Appendix 2- Interview questions

These interview questions have been translated from Swedish to English. There are 24 questions in total.

Section 1. Introducing the interviewees
Age? / Current position? / How long have you been at the Organisation? / How long have you been a manager at the Organisation? / How many employees are you in charge of?

Section 2. The use of Planning and Development talks (P&D talks)
What do they usually contain? / What do these talks mean to you as a manager? / Can you discuss sensitive topics with your employee during these talks? Do you perform any type of performance evaluation during these talks?

Section 3. Purpose and frequency
How often, according to you, should P&D talks be held? What is the main purpose of P&D talks? Please describe what a successful P&D talk is for you

Section 4. The template
What is your opinion on the template that is being used today? / Should other subjects/areas be added to the template/ be more discussed?

Section 5. Following up
Do you perform any type of follow-up on the P&D talks? When/ How often? / What is usually the focus during the follow-up talks?

Section 6. Additional support
Do you have access to necessary tools/knowledge in order to conduct successful P&D talks?

Section 7. Goals and competency gaps
Is it possible to create relevant goals for the employees, based on the P&D talks? Do the P&D talks assist you in identifying competency gaps?

Section 8. Your role as a manager
Do you feel that the P&D talks in any way contribute to your development as a manager? Does the P&D talk have any effect on you/your employee?

Section 9. Two talks
What is your opinion on the P&D talks being separated from the salary discussions?

Section 10. Other aspects
Are there other aspects of the P&D talk that you would like to discuss, that have not been considered in this interview?