

# HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN CORPORATE GROUPS

Editors

Czesław Zajęc

Dominika Bęc-Grabowska

Agnieszka Jagoda



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## Chapter 1

# Placement of the personnel function within the organisational structure of corporate groups

### 1.1. Introduction

There is a wealth of diverse approaches to corporate group classification in professional literature, both domestic and foreign. Table 1.1 presents some of the most widely used categorisation methods, suggesting that the character of economic relations between individual companies of a corporate group may be used as a criterion for the differentiation of corporate groups into structures of a horizontal, vertical, conglomerate or mixed type. The first type – a horizontal arrangement – can be observed in groups representing a strong trade-specific (or sectoral) specialisation. In horizontal structures, a parent company typically takes control over the successive stages of the production process by means of buying in the shares from partnering companies. In sectoral groups, the correlations between a parent company and its filial organisations are not limited to personal and capital links, but are also displayed in production-related, technological and marketing areas inherent to their line of business. Conversely, corporate groups of the conglomerate type are based on the

integration of economic entities from unrelated trades and sectors. It is worth noting that professional literature presents conglomerates as the ultimate stage in company development [Whittington et al. 1999, p. 519]. This type of structure is characterised, among other things, by the often apparent lack of any economic or functional correlations between the entities, their relative self-reliance, and the difficulties in providing a centralised management scheme to structures of such complexity.

Table 1.1. Types of corporate groups and criteria for their classification

Classification criterion	Types of corporate groups			
	horizontal (sectoral)	vertical (cooperative, industrial)	conglomerate	mixed
Form of economic association				
Area of operation	national	transnational	multinational	
The scope of managerial functions held by the parent company	operating	strategic	financial	
Direction of asset (capital) links	unidirectional		multidirectional	
Depth of the supremacy/subordination hierarchy	single-level		multilevel	

Source: own research based on: [Jagoda, Haus 1995, p. 22; Nogalski, Ronkowski 2004].

In terms of operational areas covered by such structures, corporate groups can be classified into national, transnational (operating in two countries), and multinational (integrating entities from more than two countries). It must be noted that the criterion of operational area does not offer a permanent categorisation placement, since the holding group may pursue various strategies in different countries, and form separate economic entities over the course of its expansion and structural development [Nogalski, Ronkowski 2000, p. 109].

Taking into consideration the direction of equity links between group members, corporate groups may be classified into holdings of unidirectional vs. multi-directional equity correlations. The former type is represented by structures with a dominant entity that holds the ownership or shares of subordinate entities. The latter also represents structures with a dominant entity, but the subordinate entities may, in this case, purchase shares of the parent company and/or other subsidiaries.

With respect to the depth of supremacy/subordination hierarchy, corporate groups can be divided into single-level and multilevel structures. Subsidiaries

are controlled by the parent company, but this does not preclude them from owning shares in other companies, with the potential to make them 'second level' subsidiaries. In effect, the whole structure takes on multilevel (or cascading) characteristics.

From our perspective, the most important criterion for corporate group differentiation is the scope (and range) of the managerial functions held by the parent company. Based on this criterion, corporate groups can be divided into holding groups of an operating, strategic or financial type. This particular classification translates directly into the management methods and the placement of the organic management functions in those structures. A notable observation in this context is that the level of involvement and influence exerted by the parent company upon management decisions made both by the whole grouping or by individual subsidiaries decreases with each category (under the adopted order of classification), as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Characteristics of typical corporate group types, as determined by the scope of managerial control held by the parent company

Characteristics	Type of corporate group		
	Operating	Strategic	Financial
Parent company	Dominant entity responsible for managing and fulfilling key operating activities for the group	Dominant entity is not involved in any of the operating activities. Its involvement is limited to group-wide strategic management and control of own shares and interests in the subsidiaries, using strategic and financial instruments	Dominant entity is not involved in any of the operating activities. Its involvement is limited to control of own shares and interests in the subsidiaries, based on financial instruments
Subsidiaries	Subsidiaries conduct operating activities to support and supplement the operating activities of the dominant entity	Subsidiaries are involved in complementary operating activities	Subsidiaries are involved in non-concerted (diversified) operating activities
Group objectives	To strengthen the competitive advantage of the dominant entity by providing subsidiary support for the operating activities of the parent	To reduce the investment risk and to maximise the return on investment for the dominant entity	To maintain and strengthen the strategic position and investment attraction of the group as a whole

Source: [Romanowska, Trocki 1998, p. 8].

## 1.2. Theoretical aspects of personnel function placement within a corporate group

Faced with the task of identifying the viable variants for the placement (architecture) of the personnel function within the structure of an economic entity, it may be useful to examine the two fundamental dimensions of this function, namely the centralisation/decentralisation and the concentration/deconcentration of its activities. This is based on the assumption that the placement of the personnel function is defined by decision-making and executive entitlements.

Concentration describes structures in which the activities undertaken within the context of the personnel function are performed by a single centre. Conversely, deconcentration refers to structures based on the delegation of personnel function activities to multiple entities. Thus, with respect to the concentration of the personnel function within a corporate group structure, two extremities may be distinguished: maximum concentration and maximum dispersion. The maximum concentration of the personnel function represents a structure where a single entity is made responsible for its realisation for all the remaining entities of the corporate grouping (bearing in mind that the function's execution may remain with the parent company or be delegated to a subsidiary). Maximum dispersion, on the other hand, describes a structure with all the constituent entities held responsible for the realisation of the personnel function in parallel, resulting in the duplication of the function within the grouping.

Centralisation/decentralisation of the personnel function refers to its placement in the vertical plane of the grouping's structure. It may be interesting to note here the difference between the centralisation/decentralisation of decisions (management) – a dimension well-represented in professional literature – and the centralisation of functions, as a fairly rare subject of scientific exploration. The latter represents a transfer of both the decision-making entitlements and all the necessary resources (human, material, financial) needed for the realisation of the function [Kozimiński 1996]. Thus, the centralisation/decentralisation of decisions will represent a subsegment of the centralisation/decentralisation of the function. In this sense, the placement will refer to both the 'place' where decisions are made and the 'places' where all the individual tasks of the function

are performed. Table 1.3 presents a detailed overview of the characteristics typical for a centralised vs. decentralised organisation of the personnel function within a corporate grouping.

Table 1.3. Centralised vs. decentralised organisation of the personnel function – characteristics

Characteristics of a centralised model	Characteristics of a decentralised model
Concentration of tasks at the level of the parent company Concentration of decision-making entitlements at the level of the parent company Concentration of resource control (material resources and information) at the level of the parent company	Delegation of tasks to subsidiaries Delegation of decision-making entitlements Delegation of resource control (material resources and information) to decentralised entities
Centralisation of tasks and placement of decision-making entitlements in a central personnel management section	Decentralisation and delegation of tasks and decision-making entitlements to subsidiaries, formation of personnel service cells or profit centres
Management and control: hierarchical	Management and control: fairly independent, sometimes hierarchical

Source: own research, based on: [Nienhuser 1999, p. 160], as cited in: [Makowski (ed.) 2001, p. 15].

The correlations and interconnections that occur in multi-entity systems, i.e. concentration-deconcentration and centralisation/decentralisation, define the architecture of those functions, with the potential to form suitable variants of the function's placement within the organisational structure of a grouping. Thus, taking into account the strength of those two dimensions (low, moderate, strong), one may distinguish between seven possible variants of the personnel function placement [Zajac 2012, pp. 48-49]:

- placement of the function in the parent company, to be responsible for servicing all the subsidiaries: this represents high centralisation and high concentration,
- placement of the function (concentration) in a selected subsidiary (or a new subsidiary dedicated to perform it – capital outsourcing), to be responsible for servicing the whole group: this represents low centralisation and high concentration,

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- the function is evenly distributed among subsidiaries, this represents low centralisation and low concentration,
- distribution of the function between the parent company and one of the subsidiaries (or a new subsidiary dedicated to perform it – capital outsourcing), this represents moderate centralisation and high concentration,
- distribution (disproportional) of the function between the parent company and selected subsidiaries, this represents moderate centralisation and moderate concentration,
- distribution (disproportional) of the function between the parent company and all the subsidiaries, this represents moderate centralisation and low concentration,
- placement of the function solely on the level of subsidiaries, this represents low centralisation and moderate concentration.

Apart from the distribution of tasks realised within the context of the personnel function between the parent company and its subsidiaries (including the capital outsourcing solutions), groups may adopt – and are increasingly making use of – yet another solution, based on the external placement of selected elements of the personnel function (such as recruitment and selection, employee training, wage calculation). This approach represents the so-called contractual outsourcing, and involves cooperation with an independent provider specialising in personnel consultancy, making it possible to outsource selected elements of the personnel function. The benefits of this solution include the potential for the group to focus on key areas of their operation and the reduction of personnel administration costs [Cook 2003; Bąk-Grabowska, Jagoda 2009, pp. 29-32]. This means that the above list of potential variants in the placement of the personnel function should be supplemented by two additional variants [Jagoda, Jagoda-Lenartowicz 2004, p. 357]:

- distribution of the function between the parent company and an external entity (or entities) outside the group structure (contractual outsourcing of the function), this represents moderate centralisation and high concentration;
- delegation of the function to an external entity (or entities) outside the group structure (contractual outsourcing of the function), this represents low centralisation and high concentration.

As a result of the so-called inalienable functions of the parent company [Nogalski, Ronkowski 2000, p. 288], i.e. those directly related to such areas as personnel policies, filling the top management positions or formulating the principles for subsidiaries with regard to employment and remuneration of top executives, both the complete deconcentration and complete outsourcing of the personnel function should not be taken into consideration. All the remaining alternatives for the placement of the personnel function seem viable [Jagoda, Jagoda-Lenartowicz 2004, p. 357]. In addition, it may be noted that a complete concentration of the personnel function in the parent company is arguably unrealistic due to the specificity of both the function itself and of the areas targeted by the function (such as the selection of production workers on behalf of every subsidiary). Also, a high concentration bears the risk of depleting the subsidiaries of their operating freedom, which is a violation of the principle of operating flexibility [Jagoda, Jagoda-Lenartowicz 2004, p. 359] which requires the parent company to refrain from activities that may limit the subsidiaries' freedom of management and operations planning [Kreft 2004, p. 85].

Another noteworthy reservation at this point is the fact that it would be fairly unrealistic to look for an ideal and proper placement of the personnel function in a group to ensure the utmost effectiveness of personal resource management. All the above placement alternatives come with their own set of strengths and weaknesses, and the selection of a particular solution is burdened with many factors, often interconnected and fluctuating in time.

However, the selection of a placement solution seems to be definitely correlated with the type of the group (operating, strategic, financial), regarded as an indicator of the degree of management centralisation. The type of group was found to correlate with the differentiation of the personnel function placement observed between financial groups on the one hand, and operating/strategic on the other hand [Trocki 2004, pp. 279-280].

In financial groups, the degree of personnel management integration is fairly limited, since most of the personnel management areas are realised on subsidiary level. The parent entity is only responsible for appointing the top management personnel of all subsidiaries and for determining the remuneration for this particular employee segment. In some groups, parent companies take on additional responsibilities in relation to subsidiary-level top



management such as training, periodic evaluation and personal development planning, further attesting to the low concentration level of the personnel function in this type of groups.

In operating and strategic-management type groups, the involvement of parent companies in the practical realisation of the personnel function is decidedly more pronounced. In these structures, close cooperation in human resource management may be observed in all the task areas of the personnel function, such as setting the personnel demand and requirements, staff selection, training and development, personnel evaluation, motivation and reallocation. The personnel strategy for the whole group is typically formulated at the level of the parent entity. In addition, the controlling entity is also responsible for supervising the implementation of the strategy in its subsidiaries. In this case, both the range and the strength of the personnel function concentration are strongly related to the group's specificity and are largely situational.

### 1.3. The decision-making and executive entitlements as applied to the realisation of the personnel function in the context of empirical studies

The empirical study was designed to provide an analytical insight into the distribution of decision-making and executive entitlements between individual members of selected groups, as applied to the realisation of the personnel function. Based on suggestions presented in professional literature, it was assumed that the type of group will determine the placement of the personnel function. The study results are shown in Table 1.4.

For the majority of the corporate groups under examination, the study revealed some form of involvement in selected task areas of the personnel function. Based on the distribution of responses presented in Table 1.4, it is difficult to pinpoint any determinants that would explain the actual choices made by those entities with respect to the decision-making and executive entitlements in the individual stages of the personnel management process. What can be observed from the responses is that the majority of the groups under study

Table 1.4. The architecture of the personnel function in corporate groups – results of an empirical study

Task area (of the personnel function)	Type of group	Task realisation		
		Parent company	Subsidiary	Parent company in cooperation with the subsidiary
1	2	3	4	5
Staff recruitment and selection	Operating	D – 36% E – 12%	D – 53.33% E – 81.33%	D – 10.67% E – 6.67%
	Strategic	D – 16.67% --	D – 58.33% E – 75%	D – 25% E – 25%
	Financial	D – 100% --	-- E – 100%	-- --
Evaluation and personal controlling	Operating	D – 65.79% E – 28.38%	D – 28.95% E – 68.92%	D – 5.26% E – 2.70%
	Strategic	D – 63.64% E – 18.18%	D – 27.27% E – 63.64%	D – 9.09% E – 18.18%
	Financial	D – 100% --	-- E – 100%	-- --
Career planning and staffing	Operating	D – 39.19% E – 10.81%	D – 54.05% E – 85.14%	D – 6.76% E – 4.05%
	Strategic	D – 18.18% --	D – 63.64% E – 81.82%	D – 18.18% E – 18.18%
	Financial	-- --	D – 100% E – 100%	-- --
Training	Operating	D – 46.15% E – 15.09%	D – 48.08% E – 81.13%	D – 5.77% E – 3.77%
	Strategic	D – 33.33% E – 33.33%	D – 44.44% E – 66.67%	D – 22.22% --
	Financial	-- --	D – 100% E – 100%	-- --
Formulation of the remuneration systems	Operating	D – 64% E – 13.33%	D – 30.67% E – 81.33%	D – 5.33% E – 5.33%
	Strategic	D – 54.55% E – 18.18%	D – 27.27% E – 63.64%	D – 18.18% E – 18.18%
	Financial	-- --	D – 100% E – 100%	-- --
Lay-offs	Operating	D – 41.33% E – 10.67%	D – 56% E – 85.33%	D – 2.67% E – 4%
	Strategic	D – 18.18% --	D – 54.55% E – 81.82%	D – 27.27% E – 18.18%
	Financial	-- --	D – 100% E – 100%	-- --

Table 1.4, cont.

1	2	3	4	5
Personnel administration	Operating	D – 31.08% E – 9.46%	D – 60.81% E – 83.78%	D – 8.11% E – 6.76%
	Strategic	D – 33.33% E – 16.67%	D – 50% E – 58.33%	D – 16.67% E – 25%
	Financial	D – 100% --	-- --	-- --

D – decision making, E – executive.

Source: own research based on results of this author's empirical study.

chose to delegate the decision-making sphere to the parent company, while the executive aspects were assigned to individual subsidiaries. However, the results of the study seem to contrast with the findings published in professional literature on the scope of the parent company's involvement in subsidiary activities that results from the managerial role assumed by the former (i.e. based on the group type). This was also confirmed by the findings obtained using statistical analysis. The results of the study, examined using Pearson's chi-square test of statistical significance and Cramer's V test of association, display probability values in excess of 0.05; suggesting that the association between the type of group and the placement of individual areas of the personnel function may be statistically insignificant. In light of the above, it may be concluded that the standard types of corporate groups are fairly eclectic in nature due to their relatively short history and the specificity of their formation.

## 1.4. Placement of the personnel function in the corporate groups under study – analyses of selected cases

The observed lack of correlation between the type of group and the placement of the personnel function in the group's structure is further corroborated by the results of the in-depth analyses of selected cases. To emphasise the scale of the problem, in-depth analyses of placement selections were performed for three strategic/management corporate groups. The author chose to limit the analyses to company structures representing the same group type; the intention was to illustrate and accentuate the wide divergence and ambiguity of the practical solutions employed by those groups.

## Corporate group B

Corporate group B is a leading global producer of transportation solutions. The group integrates production factories and service centres in 39 countries spread over four global regions (North/South America, Europe, Asia/Pacific, and Middle East/Africa). The group's organisational structure comprises four business segments:

- Transportation,
- Business Aircraft,
- Commercial Aircraft,
- Aero-structures and Engineering Services.

The group's top management (Board of Directors) consists of five to twenty members elected by the Annual General Meeting. At present, the Board of Directors consists of fourteen members. In addition, four committees are involved in managerial tasks, namely:

- Audit Committee,
- Corporate Governance and Nomination Committee,
- Human Resources and Compensation Committee,
- Finance and Risk Management Committee.

The personnel aspects are the responsibility of the Human Resources Section, under the direction of the Human Resources and Public Affairs Vice President. The Vice President reports directly to the President of the parent company and receives reports from persons responsible for global business segments. At present, the Human Resources Section is strongly centralised. The group employs the regional structure approach, but it is assumed that each region should follow the same processes using the same strategy and activities. Individual subsidiaries, in their HR duties, are supported by service centres (Chief Centres) and expert centres (Central Expertise) – these centres are responsible for the formulation of uniform policies and procedures to be used by all subsidiaries, in every region and regardless of their line of business. The entity under study – a filial branch in Wrocław – is a member of the Central Europe region. Their Chief Service is located in Romania, and the Central Expertise – in the central company for the region (Berlin, Germany). Romania is a popular location for the Chief Services of large global enterprises, along with

the Philippines, servicing most of the Eastern hemisphere. Central Expertise centres, on the other hand, are located globally and not restricted to the region of Central Europe.

The operating elements of the personnel function, such as wage calculation, are typically outsourced to an external provider. Corporate group B intends to outsource or delegate to Chief Services the whole extent of their operational activities in the HR area. However, the group intends to retain some level of independence for their business partners by delegating one or two persons (depending on the size of the partnering entity) to offer administrative support in HR management, since it seems redundant for each and every production-level employee to seek support directly from Chief Service. These persons, as business partners, are closer to the practical side of business; they may offer advice and training; they have a good knowledge of current business trends; they offer the prospect of long-term planning; and they help the company respond to urgent needs – but not in the operating area.

## Corporate group I

Corporate group I is a group of companies specialising in the outsourcing of services for economic entities. The role of the parent company is to provide strategic management for the group as a whole and to make decisions involving enterprise development. Managerial influence is exerted by the Board of the parent company acting as Corporate Board for the whole group, with support from statutory instruments (such as the General Assembly) and individual Offices.

Apart from the parent entity I1, the group includes companies operating in the areas of janitorial services, business processes and supply/delivery services. Companies within the group are organised into two main business units:

- Business Unit 1 (BU-1) – Janitorial Services – involves indoor and outdoor cleaning, specialist cleaning solutions for corporate customers, handling services, technical support and maintenance, alarm systems, closed-circuit TV, fire protection, rental and washing services for corporate customers, food preparation and catering, handling of shipment of materials and goods.

- Business Unit 2 (BU-2) – Security and Protection – provides property security solutions, alarm system monitoring, cash processing, filing and digitalisation of documents.

Both Business Units report directly to the group Board. The group's structure is supplemented by the so-called Independent Companies and Support Companies, also under the direct management of the Board. For each of the Business Units, product lines have been introduced to facilitate management procedures based on the division of companies by the service types rendered. Each product line is kept under the supervision of a line manager (Product Line Director), however this particular job description is not officially recognised in the personnel structure and is regarded as an organisational position. Through personal links, the Product Line Director post is typically manned by a Chairman of one of the subsidiaries assigned to a given product line.

The organisational structure of Corporate group I is complemented by three support departments:

- economic department,
- administrative department,
- HR department.

At the level of the whole group, the HR area is handled by the Director of Administration and HR as manager of the HR department, and reporting directly to the Board President. The HR department is mainly involved in reporting and personnel administration (hard HR), while the rest of the duties in the HR area are delegated to individual business units.

At the Business Unit level, the HR and personnel management tasks are supervised by the Personnel Management Director, receiving reports from the Department of Training and Development (soft HR) and the Department for Support of Personnel and Wages Processes (hard HR). The Personnel Management Directors of both business units report directly to the Board President.

Based on the case study of Business Unit 1, it may be observed that the realisation of the personnel and HR tasks of all the companies within a given business unit is a duty typically assigned to the unit's leading entity.

At the operating level, personnel and wage calculation duties for the whole group are outsourced to an external provider (although the company in question is still part of the group owners' portfolio), while strategic aspects in this area are handled at the level of the corporate group itself.

Occasionally, the corporate group employs external HR consulting companies to provide selected personnel management services in those soft HR areas which fall outside the competences of their internal HR teams. Outsourcing is also used for the handling of top management development tasks.

The range of HR-related entitlements and responsibilities is defined in internal regulations – this applies to the personnel tasks realised both at the level of the whole group and at the level of individual business units. Formal and legal issues within the HR area are handled in close cooperation with the group's Board.

In the respondent's opinion, the present placement of the HR organisational cell (at the level of the whole group) is a suitable solution, although not without problems (these are mostly related to frequent staff fluctuations). At the same time, the respondent was in favour of the suggestion to allocate a section for HR development tasks at company level, reporting directly to the Board.

## Corporate group P

Corporation P is a strategic corporate group under the management of P1 company. The latter's main line of business is to manage the remaining five members of the group. As the corporate centre, P1 is responsible for making the majority of strategic decisions for the group, and acting as a communications hub for its subsidiaries. The P1 company also retains most of the administrative functions (IT, accounting, HR, controlling) and is responsible for servicing and coordinating these areas on behalf of the subsidiaries. In effect, the controlling company acts in the capacity of an integrating entity for all the companies of the group, taking care of the tasks involved in the transfer of knowledge and skills between all the partners. The group's largest company – P2 PLC – produces machinery and equipment for the paper mill industry. The company plays the role of the main production/design unit, and is responsible for HR management, trade, sales and marketing for the group. Of the remaining partners, P3 PLC

concentrates on the design and production of steel constructions; P4 PLC deals in the production and renovation of shafts for machine mill equipment, as well as the servicing of all equipment produced by the group; P5 PLC (operating in China) focuses on the production and development of technologies for light machinery used in toilet paper manufacturing processes; and P6 with a highly diversified business profile, including reverse engineering, aerospace technologies, as well as sales and service support for the group in the region of North America. In total, the companies of the group employ upwards of 650 people.

As already mentioned, the HR tasks are localised mainly in the corporate centre (P1 company). In-depth interviews with both the Chairman of the Board and the HR Director suggest that the controlling entity acts as coordinator for all the HR-related tasks realised by all the partners (separate HR departments are found in each of the group's companies), and the partners enjoy a relative freedom with respect to their HR decision-making entitlements, although the execution of these rights is typically case-specific and subject to individual arrangements.

For instance, the P5 company enjoys practically unrestricted freedom in the HR management area, with the parent company (and their HR department) involved solely in coordinating the employment of top management personnel; all the remaining tasks of the personnel function (i.e. those related to the personnel employed in China) are realised by P5's own HR department. Both the decision-making and the executive powers in the HR sphere are held internally by P5. On the other hand, the subsidiaries operating on Polish territory are more closely integrated, with the parent company taking more direct control over the realisation of their personnel function. The P2 company is involved in the formal periodic evaluation of the board directors of the remaining subsidiaries, and supervises the unified motivation/loyalty systems – particularly the tasks involved in the periodic evaluation of employees. In effect, the decision-making entitlements are – to a large extent – retained by the parent company, while their corresponding executive empowerments are held by individual subsidiaries as part of their regular duties. The above structure and placement of the personnel function has received positive opinions from the study respondents.



## 1.5. Conclusions

Both the quantitative research and the analysis of the three case studies of the strategic/managerial corporate groups suggest a large divergence of the practical solutions related to the placement of the personnel function in this type of economic structures. The study results offered no potential for the identification of any model architecture for the realisation of this function in the context of corporate groups in relation to group type. As already mentioned, the authors assume that this apparent lack of tangible evidence is a result of the relatively short history of the business operation of the groups under study, and of their ongoing pursuit of the most optimal organisational solutions.

To sum up, it may be concluded that the organisation of the personnel function is not related to the type of corporate group (strategic, financial, operating). Taking into account some of the other problems identified in the course of empirical studies and the largely traditional approach to HR management represented by the corporate groups under examination, it seems that the conclusions offered in professional literature should be more actively propagated among the top executives of the groups under study, in the form of a recommendation that the organisation of the personnel function should be more closely related to the type of the corporate group. This conclusion is of particular importance, since the results obtained in the course of empirical studies offer no arguments to contest the validity of corporate group typology as such or the search for model solutions in the area of the organisation of the personnel function.

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