

**LABOUR MARKET EXPECTATIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF  
TECHNOLOGY GRADUATES IN HUMAN RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME  
PLANNING**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, **TEBOHO ABRAM NCOKAZI**, student number 2005025727, declare that the thesis hereby submitted in for the qualification **PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR** degree in Higher Education Studies at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university. All sources referred to in this study have been duly acknowledged. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free

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TEBOHO. A.NCOKAZI

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Date

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

- My lovely family, Mmakoena (spouse), Vuyisile and Vuyo (sons) and Nobuhle (daughter).
- My role model and pillar of strength who encouraged me since the commencement of the study journey, Prof Thandwa Mthembu.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

CA	Content Analysis
CBST	Center for Business Strategy and Tactics
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
COE	Centre for Organisational Effectiveness
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EC	Employer Community
EC	European Commission
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HR	Human Resource
HRCS	Human Resource Competency Study
HRCS	The Human Resource Competency Study
HRI	Human Resource Institute
HRM	Human Resource Management
HRPA	Human Resources Professionals Association
IPMA	International Personnel Management Association
N.D	No date/ not dated
N.P	No page
NAPA	National Academy of Public Administration
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OPM	The Office of the Personnel Management
PM	Personnel Management
SA	South Africa
SABPP	South Africa Board of People Practices
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SHRM	Society of Human Resource Management
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
UK	United Kingdom
UoT	University of Technology
USA	United States of America
WFPMA	World Federation of Personnel Management Association

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## ABSTRACT

Globally, the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) evolved from a support endeavour into a strategic counterpart for the effective functioning of organisations. The evolution of HR has determined various changing roles in the field. HR basically has reacted to external challenges and constant changes such as technological advances, globalisation and dwindling economies globally, a competitive market environment, increasing organisational complexity, increased external competition, reduced budgets and tougher demands from business.

This study investigates the evolution of human resource management competencies, knowledge and attributes, and how these changes dictate the manner in which HR curricula need to change in order to be responsive to the needs of the South African labour market and elsewhere in the world.

This also takes cognisance of the fact that the world has become a global village, and therefore organisations operate across the global spectrum. HR curricula in institutions of higher learning, especially the universities of technology (UoTs) need to adapt and include the HR qualities that the world of work perceive as fundamental in the execution of duties of HR professionals and the training of HR students. The revised and reformed HRM curriculum and subsequent changes ideally will reflect changing knowledge and competencies, and required attributes being aligned with the professional requirements demanded by the world of work. This study, therefore, focused on several HR competency models and relevant competencies and skills sets, as well as attributes that were exposed as meeting the evolving world of work.

The researcher applied a qualitative analysis that involves a process of designing condensed raw data into categories or themes based on valid inferences and interpretation. This enabled the analysis of HR job requirements, since a purposeful sample of organisations in the South African labour market had been selected. The data were coded and analysed to identify core consistencies and meanings, revealing those competencies and skills, knowledge and attributes that characterise the contemporary HR specialist. The identified characteristics, competencies and skills

sets, as well as behavioural attributes that reflect an 'ideal' HR professional and HR graduate were scrutinised in terms of the perceived HR requirements indicated by the world of work. This was done with the purpose of recommending the linkage of HR requirements according to the perception of the labour market to the curriculum design and planning of HR training programmes in higher education institutions. This also was done to elucidate to the higher education institution what needs to inform HR training in terms of the development of knowledge, competencies and attributes to be responsive to the requirements of the world of work. This study finally integrates the criteria and requirements for higher education qualifications with the demands of the profession and accordingly illustrates how the curriculum could balance academic knowledge, societal pressures and employer needs and thus produce graduates who fulfil a responsible role in the global field of HR profession.

**Key words:** Curriculum design, Human resource management, labour market.

## OPSOMMING

Die veld van menslikehulpbronbestuur het wêreldwyd ontwikkel van 'n ondersteuningstrewer tot 'n strategiese genoot in die strewer na effektiewe funksionering in organisasies. Die evolusie van menslike hulpbronne (MH) het verskeie veranderende rolle op die terrein bepaal. MH het basies gereageer op eksterne uitdagings en voortdurende veranderinge soos tegnologiese vooruitgang, globalisering en verskroepelende ekonomieë reg deur die wêreld; 'n mededingende markomgewing, toenemende organisatoriese kompleksiteit, 'n toename in eksterne wedywering, krimpende begrotings en dwingendere eise vanuit die sakewêreld.

In die studie is die evolusie van die kompetensies vir menslikehulpbronbestuur ondersoek, asook hoe dié veranderinge die wyse voorskryf waarop MH-kurrikula moet verander ten einde gehoor te gee aan die behoeftes van die Suid-Afrikaanse arbeidsmark en ook elders in die wêreld. Hierin word dit ook in ag geneem dat die wêreld 'n aardedorp geword het; dus opereer organisasies regoor die globale spektrum. MH-kurrikula aan hoëronderwysinstellings, veral aan die universiteite vir tegnologie, sal moet aanpas en die MH-kwaliteite wat deur die arbeidsveld as grondliggend beskou word vir die uitvoering van die pligte van professionele menslikehulpbronbestuurders en die opleiding van MH-studente, insluit. Die ideaal is dat die hersiene en aangepaste MHB-kurrikulum en die daaruit voortspruitende veranderinge belyning moet weerspieël van die veranderende kennis en kompetensies met die professionele vereistes van die arbeidsveld. Die studie het dus die fokus geplaas op verskeie MH-kompetensiemodelle en -vaardighede, en eienskappe is blootgelê wat voldoen aan die evolusie in die arbeidsveld.

Die navorser het van kwalitatiewe analise gebruik gemaak wat 'n proses van omsetting van rou data in kategorieë of temas, gebaseer op geldige afleidings en interpretasies, behels. Dit het dit moontlik gemaak om MH-posvereistes te analiseer, aangesien 'n monster van organisasies in die Suid-Afrikaanse arbeidsmag doelgerig geselekteer is. Die data is gekodeer en geanaliseer om kernkonsekwensies en -betekenisse te identifiseer, en daardeur is die kompetensies en vaardighede, kennis en eienskappe wat die kontemporêre MH-spesialis kenmerk, blootgelê. Die geïdentifiseerde eienskappe, kompetensies en vaardighede, sowel as die

gedragskenmerke wat die 'ideale' professionele MH-praktisyn en -gegraduateerde weerspieël, is deeglik bestudeer met betrekking tot waarneembare MH-vereistes soos aangedui deur die arbeidsveld. Dit is gedoen met die oog daarop om die koppeling van MH-vereistes volgens die persepsie van die arbeidsmark met kurrikulumontwerp en -beplanning vir MH-opleiding aan hoërondewysinstellings aan te beveel. Dit is ook gedoen om vir hoërondewysinstellings lig te werp op wat gedoen moet word om MH-opleiding beter toe te rus ten opsigte van die ontwikkeling van kennis, kompetensies en eienskappe ten einde te voldoen aan die vereistes van die arbeidsveld. In die finale instansie word die kriteria en vereistes van hoërondewyskwalifikasies in die studie met die vereistes van die profesie geïntegreer en illustreer dit hoe die kurrikulum akademiese kennis, gemeenskapsdruk en werkgewerbehoefte kan balanseer, en sodoende gegraduateerdes kan lewer wat 'n verantwoordelike rol kan vervul op die globale terrein van die profesie van menslikehulpbronbestuur.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Menslikehulpbronbestuur, kurrikulumontwerp, arbeidsmark.

# *Chapter One*

## *Background and orientation – Setting the scene*

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current employment environment is characterised by constant change, and is a determining factor that has exposed organisations to enormous pressure such as to consider adapting to innovations and developments of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The best way to survive in a volatile and ever-evolving environment, is for organisations to keep abreast of the changes that are so imperative for organisational growth. As a result of these changes, human resource (HR) professionals and their management are seen as being essential and crucial in an organisation (Beech & Chadwick, 2006). Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart and Wright (2014) state that quality HR staff are the lifeblood of any organisation, as there is a link between HR and business strategy. The propensity to manage people as resources in an organisation, is vital for maintaining stability and growth, and to give them a competitive edge over others. According to Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, and Wright (2009), and also Swanson and Holton (2009), well-trained HR professionals perform better in the organisation and give the business a competitive edge. Well-trained HR professionals and their inclination for effective practice in HR have also significantly improved both the financial and operational performance of organisations (Sikora & Ferris, 2014:1). Therefore, organisations are inclined to appoint knowledgeable employees to ensure best results.

Human resource management (HRM) is evolving rapidly in a competitive work environment. HRM is also seen as fulfilling an increasingly strategic role. Therefore, the success of an organisation clearly relies on well-equipped HR professionals to function as strategic partners within the organisation. In essence, the focus of contemporary HR professionals stretches beyond the mere management of employee terms and conditions.

The literature review chapter will indicate clearly that the recent period has seen the HR function include strategic appointment and retention, talent development – and succession planning, which is at the top of the agenda in HR evolution (Chan, 2011).

A crucial aspect of HR professionals is the training, development and nurturing of this significant resource in any organisation. As illustrated by Lall and Zaidi (2008), the significance of HRM for an organisation is based on three fundamental principles. HRM is an:

- Instrument within the organisation that caters for growth;
- Acts as a liaison between the employee and employer, and
- Is a professional field in its own right.

The shared sentiment about HR is that there should be an increased emphasis on human resource practitioner competencies – as a means to increase HR's effectiveness (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2002).

The important role of HR professionals in a competitive and rapidly evolving environment, demands that they acquire the knowledge and competencies to meet the needs of the industry. This calls upon higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare graduates for the world of work (Langbert, 2005:437; Teichler, 1999:169-190). The imparting of relevant skills via a responsive curriculum is seen as critical (Dyer, 1999; Teichler, 1999). Therefore, HR curricula continuously must be reorganised to accommodate the latest trends in industry.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

A University World News online article (*University World News* article, 2013) avers that the current work environment necessitates continuous changes in curricula to meet the demands of the contemporary organisation. The *University World News* (2013) article further states that “universities could benefit from joint research with the private sector, which in turn could help institutions fine-tune curricula to meet job market requirements.” In the same vein, Waruru (2013), in an article entitled “Call for strong links between universities, companies” makes an appeal that “universities in East Africa must ensure that their curricula meet the manpower needs of industry and the

global market”, while Shah (in Waruru 2013) asserts that “...despite passing exams with flying colours, many graduates lack useful skills, forcing employers to train them for up to six months”.

These statements clearly point to the increasing importance of universities focussing on being responsive to the needs of the labour market. The apparent lack of academia-industry relations within a clearly defined framework is a clear deterrent in graduate preparedness for the world of work (Waruru, 2013).

The development of relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to prepare HR professionals for the world of work, should be covered in the academic curricula of higher education institutions. The emphasis is irrefutably placed on producing quality graduates for the world of work. However, this can only be achieved through the development and improvement of courses and programmes offered at higher education institutions (Lucas, 2006). In this study, cognisance is taken of the fact that, as higher education grows and society and business become increasingly diversified in terms of needs, the quality and relevance of programmes are expected to respond to the labour market (Zwane, Du Plessis & Slabbert, 2014).

Lucas (2006) maintains that the current growth and diversification of higher education systems, civil society and the business world are increasingly affected by the quality of teaching and the programmes offered to HE graduates. In addition, Leisyte and Dee (2012) maintain that in response to the changing environment that calls for quality of education in universities – academics will have to refocus and rethink their role and also the product they offer. The focus on the curriculum demands that it be adapted and based on training professionals using relevant curricular material (Cummings & Teichler, 2014). As a result, there is an increase in public evaluations and international comparison of higher education institutions – in terms of complying with the needs of the labour market and the business fraternity (Orsingher, Valentini & de Angelis, 2010).

Over the past two decades, in pursuance of the evolution from a transactional role to a strategic role, the role of HR professionals and the field of HRM in general continues to be relevant (Vosburgh, 2008). Development is occurring as the field of HR evolves in order to respond to the changing demands of contemporary organisations (Kaufman, 2014; Vosburgh, 2008). To illustrate this, Jamrog and Overholt (2004:56) state that “while human resource educators are committed to supply firms with graduates who meet corporate requirements, they may not always know what is required”.

In an open-ended question survey conducted by the Human Resource Institute (HRI), it was reported that HR professionals believed that the leading role of human resource professionals was that of being a business partner and ‘strategic thinker’ (see Lawler & Mohrman, 2003b). In spite of this belief, it should be noted that many HR professionals are challenged in the workplace (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003b). This is because they do not possess the depth and breadth of business knowledge and experience, which are essential to serve in these strategic and business roles (Lawler, 2005).

According to the COE, The Centre for Organisational Effectiveness, in Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004) it is commented that even though tremendous developments had been observed in the field of HR, there are still many challenges facing HR leaders and HR professionals. The challenge noted – amongst many others – is the increased desire for strategic HR intervention that also pointed to a rapid rise in the demands and expectations of HR involvement in organisational strategic direction.

In addition to this assertion, organisations have relatively negative perceptions of the HR contribution to business strategy (Lawler, 2004; Lawler 2005; Lawler & Boudreau, 2009; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003). However, HR professionals maintain that their contribution to the business is meaningful (Lawler, 2005). This calls for HR to

demonstrate their contribution with clear and observable methodologies - to the world of work. Magau & Roodt, 2010:1) argued that in order for HR management to play a strategic role in the organisations, it should develop its ability to measure how human capital decisions affect business and vice versa to demonstrate its value added to line management. However, Boudreau and Ramstad (2004) asserted that the good news is that HR never enjoyed wider recognition of its importance and value. Thus, the involvement of HR in strategic issues will provide ample opportunity and encourage HR professionals to play key strategic roles in their organisation. Lawler and Mohrman (2003b) aver that the latter pointer indicates that HR professionals have a strategic role that has an impact on the organisation's strategic direction.

The motivation for transforming the HR curriculum appears to be of crucial importance, given the rapid changes and the manner in which organisations do their business (SHRM, 2010). The HR curricular modification came about as a result of the developments in the HR profession (Thacker, 2002). Furthermore, studies conducted by Wang (2011) and SHRM (2010), recently asserts that HR curriculum revisions are important in ensuring the good quality of HR. The interdependence of curriculum, industrial structure and HR quality plays a crucial role in ensuring that HEIs responds to the needs of the labour market or industry. As a result, HR programmes must also be aligned with and be seen to be reflecting and tackling critical qualities that the world of work demands. HR academic programmes should prepare leaders and professionals in the field with well-researched content that focuses on real issues that could enhance organisations' chances of growth and sustainability, in a competitive environment. The critical role that HR curricula could play – is to ensure that content does not lack relevance and responsiveness. These are aspects that the world of work perceives as being fundamental (Thacker, 2002). The HR content should must include the knowledge that graduates need to display and competencies could include skills, abilities and attributes which are critical in the effective functioning of the HR profession. Furthermore, Thacker (2002) asserts that

*“Those in the world of academia are often accused of living in an ivory tower, teaching students in ways that lack relevance in the world of work. The problem*

*often arises in college curricula, which may be outdated and dependent upon textbook rote learning”*

According to Bakrani and NabiPoor (2015), the curriculum modification and its impact is manifested in other studies that revealed the importance of improvement of curriculum with the intention of gaining competencies that prepares students for careers in various economic sectors and social life.. Thus, as this study seeks to determine the requisite qualities required in HR curricula, the thrust of the research around the phenomenon is to produce new knowledge for the professionals and graduates in the HR field; this is instead of merely conducting an evaluation of what the curricula entail (Hein & Riegel, 2011).

## **1.2.1 Decolonisation of the curriculum in Higher Education**

### **1.2.1.1 The concept of decolonisation**

The concept of decolonisation according to Kamanzi (2016- University World News) is an essential attempt that includes the process of getting rid of negative effects of the historical colonialism with the intention of creating a conducive environment for self-reliance and self-determination, and this provides ample opportunity for influx of relevant ideologies, approaches and creation of new knowledge in the context of relevance to the African situation. In the context of this study, decolonisation of education will succinctly trace the historical developments of the field of HR management as it mainly emanates from the Industrialisation Era in the US and its effects stretched to European countries as well as Asia.

As espoused in chapter one, the HR management has changed names various times throughout history. The name change came as a result of various changes in societal and economic changes that prevailed throughout the history. The changes and practices in HR management were designed to maximise the satisfactory performance levels of employees with emphasis on imparting the necessary knowledge and skills sets by HR practitioners. This also meant that HR would further be tasked with the responsibility to create conditions suitable for employment, facilitate employees' efforts toward meeting the organisation's objectives.

To this end, the decolonisation of HE curricula and programmes became the focal point of importance as it is the mechanism through the curriculum and programme of instruction would be refocused, repackaged and modelled to suit the Africa and South African contexts. HESA (2014: 7) argued that ‘the change at universities must entail ‘decolonising, deracialising, demasculinising and degendering’ the institutions as well as ‘engaging with ontological and epistemological issues in all their complexity, including their implications for research, methodology, scholarship, learning and teaching, curriculum and pedagogy’. In order for the objective of decolonising the South African universities of the US and European based ideologies, approaches, histories as well as theories to be realised, the decolonising of the curriculum at universities must begin by ending the domination of Western epistemological traditions (Molefe, 2016). Heleta (2016) maintains that since the dismantling of the apartheid regime in 1994, epistemologies and knowledge systems of education in most of the South African universities remains unchanged.

#### **1.2.1.2. Decolonisation of higher education in South Africa**

According to Molefe (2015) students and academics began with the campaign to decolonise the curriculum at universities. The rationale for the campaign was based on the fact that the Western model of academic organisation on which the South African university is currently based is still perceived to be largely remaining unchallenged. The 2015 campaigns in most of the South African universities sparked as a result of a solemn attempt to rid universities of procedures, norms, practices, ideologies and choices that could endorse and promote the idea of dismantling any education that bears European connotations. This is critical as any knowledge creation institution need to base its product on new exploratory ways that take into cognisance the responsiveness of the curricula and programmes aligned to the challenges faced by universities in South Africa. The creation of policies and frameworks that echoed concepts related to equality, transformation and equity, institutional cultures have not adequately addressed the challenges of higher education that were embraced by the former regimes in South Africa.

In order for the decolonisation of the curriculum to be a reality, an enormous task of research need to take place. Mbembe (2016:32) points to the fact that syllabuses need to be designed in a way that profoundly meet the need for epistemological change in HEIs. The question that needs to get a proper response, according to Mbembe (2016) is *'to what extent do South African institutions of higher learning provide content and programmes that directly responds to the social and economic context of South Africa as an independent country'*.

For South African HEIs to overcome challenges associated with the colonialism of higher education, and in particular the programme offerings and content as well as the curriculum, universities are compelled to rethink and reconstruct the Eurocentric and colonial curriculum, methods of teaching and learning. In supporting this notion, Letsekha (2013:9) avows that HEIs systems requires a 'fundamental overhaul of the entire whole epistemological model underlying the current educational system'. The entire process will need concerted effort by stakeholders in higher education system, namely students' representative bodies, the academic body, the business fraternity and well as government organs that are tasked with the education matters.

Shay (2016) pointed to the challenges higher education in general faces regarding decolonising the curriculum. The study will succinctly discuss three areas relevant to the study like fit for purpose for undergraduate curriculum, the relevance of curriculum and current dominating world views.

#### **a. Fit for purpose for undergraduate curriculum and programme offering**

There needs to be a scrutiny about the appropriateness of the existing South African undergraduate programmes and curricula in terms of its relevance to the new generations given the variety of needs, technology wise students and the ever-evolving world of work (Bucur & Popa, 2015; Mhlolo, 2011). The question that needs to be answered is whether curricula and programmes that were offered two decades back is still relevant. Furthermore, while the higher education need to ensure that the current curricula and programmes are responsive to the South African context, it should be noted that students and academics alike need to be exposed to the global

context. South African higher education system need to be on the alert in terms of the global context and ensure that competent graduates are produced by system.

### **b. Real world relevance**

The real world issues touch directly on the relevance of curriculum and programme designed by higher education. The relevance of the curriculum to the transition from university to the world of work, and to the need to improve society's attitudes towards higher education's ability to prepare graduates for the world of work.

According (Du Preez, 2014) what is paramount importance is issues around reorganisation of systems and diversification in structures, and changes in curriculum design and delivery in universities. Furthermore, Vessuri avers that when higher education moves towards a mass enrolment system as most economies become increasingly knowledge intensive and therefore depend more on graduates of HE. The appropriateness of curriculum is vital as there should not be a problem of graduate employment and employability since this could raise questions about the benefit of tertiary education, the value of the curriculum and learning experience.

### **c. Dominating worldviews**

According to Schiro (2008) the curriculum dominance centres on the culture that vie for control over other educational systems. Proponents of each ideology on curriculum attempt to convert other people to succumb and have their respective viewpoint as they assert that their educational perspective is the only proper, natural, and acceptable way of viewing the field Schiro (2008:9). Msila and Gumbo (2016) further points to the fact that Western dominance to curriculum do disadvantage indigenous African students and advantages non-indigenous students. According to Msila and Gumbo (2016) a Western approach to does a disservice to indigenous African students by pushing the positivist stance that the Western knowledge systems can be justice at the expense of the African systems.

Given the exploratory succinct exposition above, it is clear that the decolonisation of the curriculum is not an easy task as there need to be a lot of research involved and various perspectives taken into account. Internationally there is an awareness of a

need for people in higher education constantly to be developing and reviewing curricula in accordance with the changing circumstances. In South Africa, because of the developments in the country and in higher education in particular, changes in curricula are imperative. Curriculum need to both take into account the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching and the students' experiences of the learning process.

### **1.2.2 The HR programme planning and curriculum development**

A fundamental and recurring challenge for higher education programmes is that the ever-evolving changes in the labour market demand that the HR curriculum be reviewed and aligned to the needs of the contemporary organisation (Madsen, Musto & Hall, 2003:1; Ogude, Nel & Oosthuizen, 2005; Mkhonto, 2007). Madsen *et al.* (2003:15) declare that academic programmes need to “reflect current research findings and job market needs and competencies”. This calls for institutions of higher education to develop degree programmes, which are responsive to the needs of the labour market. Thus, the new programmes need to be designed to reflect the graduate qualities needed, and also the needs of the labour market. In this regard, Madsen *et al.* (2003:15) also stated that “...*responding to the increasing demand for employee skills, expertise, and performance in rapidly changing economic and social environments, many universities have implemented academic programs to educate and train ... practitioners ...*”. Of central significance, therefore, is that universities face the challenge of ensuring the responsiveness of the curriculum to the ever-changing and contemporary demands of the world of work. Therefore, the question of competencies that research revealed should be reflected in the curriculum.

According to Mkhonto (2007), the higher education curricula in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have changed focus and focussed on responding to both the internal and external environments. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century curricula need to equip graduates with key competencies like the knowledge, skills and attributes that will ensure the effectiveness of graduates in the performance of their duties. Furthermore, according to Lee (2002), it is widely accepted that the academic programme's content – which is

the core responsibility of the curricula – places a high premium on ensuring that the high quality of the programme is at the heart of learning. This trend has increasingly become an important factor for success in the field of HR, and therefore the goal of the study focuses on identifying those HR qualities which are required for incorporation into the HR curriculum. The rationale for the study is thus to respond to the needs of the labour market and the HRM discipline – by ensuring that the curriculum provides a true reflection of the core knowledge areas identified by the employer community (EC).

It is therefore no wonder that HR courses – once found only in universities – are now offered at most higher education institutions. HRM educational programmes demonstrate the same mix of continuity and change as the practice of HRM in industry. The performance of the core task, however, has been transformed since the first personnel departments were established in the late 1910s (Kaufman, 2007). Lepak, Bartol and Erhardt (2005:140) argued that over the past two decades the HRM function also has been challenged to take up a new direction in terms of its role to support the organisation. The HR profession has been challenged to contribute to organisations in a more strategic role. This has involved new employment laws, reorganised methods of work design and management – as well as assistance to achieve success in the competing environment of enterprises. The traditional function of HR that includes hiring, administration of policies and selection of employees, has changed drastically to force HR to respond to the needs of the organisation – so as to contribute to the strategic direction (Ulrich, 1996). HRM education programmes should demonstrate the same responsiveness to change, and they have evolved in ways that reflect new skills (Bratton & Gold, 2012).

Hammonds (2005:42) and Bolton and Storr (2006) criticised HR for its failure to perform according to the promised role and said that it needs to justify its existence and deliver on the strategic promises. These authors maintain that HR concentrates largely on individual needs and neglects the bigger picture of the organisation. On the other hand, the HR bodies maintain that they exist in order to support HR professionals to gain recognition and the appropriate respect – that will give them leverage in

organisations. HR needs to have a strategic understanding of the business and the competitive environment in which it operates (Lawler & Boudreau, 2012; Missildine, 2015). HR professionals must be accepted as participating in strategic decision-making processes of an organisation. Therefore, the curriculum, due to its redesign aimed at ensuring transformation and improvement of learning, must provide new competencies and skills which are in line with the strategic goals of the organisation. Missildine (2015) avers that the transformation of HR will ensure the ability to turn transactional management of business leadership into strategy. Thus HR professionals must enhance their credibility by becoming more proficient in strategic and business competencies. This calls for newly researched knowledge on what HR professionals need to possess – in order to earn respect, space and recognition from the contemporary labour market.

In responding to the programme planning and curriculum development as necessitated by the ever-changing developments in the labour market, the study would align the programme planning and curriculum development with the broad guidelines provided by the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004) as the basis for both programme planning and curriculum development. The guidelines referred to here are succinctly depicted below (cf. Council on Higher Education, 2004:6 – 8 & 10 - 11):

1. Programme needs to be in line with the institution's mission and meet the national requirements.
2. In planning the programme the needs of student and other relevant stakeholders such as the industry, government and business must be accommodated.
3. The intellectual credibility of the programme needs to be maintained at all times.
4. Make certain that the articulation with other programmes and offer career pathways.
5. In the designing process of the learning programme characteristics and needs of professional and vocational education need to be catered for.
6. Learning materials development must always entail programme outcomes that meet the expectations of the labour market and other socio-cultural needs of various stakeholders.

This study aims to assess the current state of human resource academic programmes, and to identify recommended HRM core curriculum content areas that are either under-represented or require additional offerings to aid the progress of the human resource profession in its endeavour to add value to the world of business.

### **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The study seeks to investigate the current trends and developments with regard to the HR qualities that HR professionals – who have graduated recently - need to display in their strategic role in organisations. *The focal point of the study is on research about the requisite HR qualities that the world of work perceives as being essential in the execution of HR professionals' work. Furthermore, the study attempts to gather evidence of key HR qualities – with the ultimate aim of making recommendations on current HR programmes in a University of Technology (UoT).* According to Walsh, Michael, Sturman and Longstreet (2010), the labour market concerns itself with the value that the employee can add to the performance of the organisation. As a result, HR professionals need to acquire the necessary set of expertise and qualities to ensure meaningful contributions to the organisation.

#### **1.3.1 Preparedness of graduates in higher education**

In realising the challenges of relevance of skills, Mlambo-Ngcuka, as quoted by Griesel and Parker (2009:2), states that higher education institutions need to improve their curricula in order to equip graduates with requisite skills that will lead to employment. As employers search for employees with specific and relevant skills and qualities for an efficient, productive and professional workplace – higher education institutions are required to ensure the delivery of relevant curricula and learning programmes.

In emphasising the need for relevant skills for employment purposes, Mlambo-Ngcuka (2006), commented that:

*The phenomenon of unemployed graduates, who are without abilities to self-employ and self-determine, after spending three to four years of post-secondary education is an indication to all of us of the challenge in our education at the tertiary level ... the curriculum developers are not paying enough attention to issues of relevance and ensuring that we all pay attention to the skills and competencies learners require when they come out of higher education ... we need a skill revolution in the curriculum of tertiary education.*

As this statement suggests, graduates from higher education institutions are more likely to find employment than people with lower levels of qualifications (Comunian & Gilmore, 2016:109). Given that graduates need to acquire relevant competencies to increase their performance, the European Commission (2013:42) also emphasised the importance of the extent to which employers need to be satisfied with the preparedness of graduates for the job market. Higher education faces the challenges of modernising education programmes to provide graduates with high-level, employable skills – as well as the transferable skills that equip graduates for a fast-changing labour market (cf. EC, 2013). What is apparent, is the call that higher education needs to offer programmes and curricula that are relevant to the world of work (Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006).

Higher education institutions, in general, primarily produce two fundamental outputs: knowledge through research, and relevant skills in the form of knowledgeable graduates (UNESCO, 1991). This only can happen through designing a relevant curriculum that addresses both labour market-related skills and research skills (Mason, Williams & Cranmer 2006:2). Furthermore, higher education (HE) has a uniquely important role in resolving the persistent skills shortage in South Africa, and that must happen through the production of qualified graduates and postgraduates and through generating research and innovation (Fisher & Scott, 2011). On the other hand, there is a need for globally equivalent skills – and that opens the debate about curriculum relevance in HE (Dell, 2014; HEFCE, 2010).

The Society for Human Resource Management (SRHM, 2013: n.p.) serves as good guidance for shaping the HR curricula of most HE institutions with HR programmes. These developments in the HR curriculum were founded on research into HR curricula conducted earlier (Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006). SRHM (2013) defined and illustrated parameters that programme designers in universities may use when improving the content of human resource programmes.

A 2012 OECD study signifies that the fundamental changes in employment over the past years implied a rise in the demand for non-routine cognitive and interpersonal skills. This resulted in a decline in the demand for routine knowledge areas like craft skills, physical labour, and repetitive physical tasks (OECD, 2012). Graduates are entering a world of employment characterised by greater uncertainty, speed, risk, complexity and working interdisciplinary. Therefore, the world of work needs relevant skills sets, knowledge, and attributes that will ensure that graduates perform optimally. The real challenge for the higher education system is to determine the skills sets and disciplines that are being drawn on by society and the economy (Presidential Discussion Document, 2005:11). In essence, higher education institutions need to ensure that they impart the highest possible level of knowledge and basic skills possible – in any skills set and discipline (OECD, 2012). As this requires a very close understanding of the surrounding society and economy, the university and particularly its academic staff, have to be deeply embedded in that society and economy.

Graduates of all higher education programmes – whether vocational, technical, professional or more general – must be equipped with a relevant skills set and knowledge that addresses the needs of the labour market (University World News, 2013). Graduates therefore need to develop cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness and responsibility, and also a sense of the larger societal challenges within which they will conduct their chosen careers (OECD, 2012). This means that the higher education sector, especially universities at large, are coming under increasing pressure to ensure that their graduates are recognised as employable by the world of work. Preparation for employment is still only rarely incorporated in university programmes, and the skills that could make a difference in finding employment and ways to deliver those skills,

are not evident (University World News, 2013). This has profound implications for curriculum design. This assertion also suggests that economic responsiveness should be integrally related to institutional and cultural responsiveness.

The revised HR programmes and curricula need to bridge the gap between the outdated role of the HR profession and the needs of the contemporary organisation. The shift from traditional practices, namely technical and administrative activities, is evidently crucial if the HR field is to play a more strategic role. This trend is not the case with the HR field, but it is a norm that cuts across all functions of management, in disciplines like finance that advanced from accounting, and the marketing function that developed from the sales function (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). Because people are the driving force behind any successful organisation, the prominence of strategic HR in organisations cannot be overemphasised (Gilani, Zadeh & Saderi, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial that organisations implement well-planned strategic HR ideas that will help coordinate the human capital to increase production. Clearly, human capital development has become a key issue in organisations – and it now is imperative that the knowledge, skills and abilities required of HR professionals be aligned with the expectations of their new role. To be successful in this transition, it is vital that the knowledge, skills and abilities that shape the role of HR professionals, are tailored to fit better with knowledge-based industries. HR practitioners in South Africa (SA) should be trained to respond to the socio-economic challenges that impact on the workplace (Abbott, 2012). The changing nature of work dictates that South African HR professionals become competent and be ranked as global competitors in the search for talent (Beechler & Woodward, 2009). HR programmes thus must be seen as curricula that are designed to address the changing role of HR as a discipline, so empowering future HR professionals with competencies demanded by the changing role of HR. The researcher therefore holds that HR graduates who are exposed to the curricula which are designed to address changing demands, stand a better chance to make successful career progression in the HR field.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the interpretative paradigm (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout (2014: 27-28). As opposed to the positivism paradigm in terms of different ontological and epistemological positions, the interpretive stance in research is that the world is constructed by human beings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) While in general terms the objects of study of natural sciences have independent existence, the objects of social sciences are both dependent on and are the creation of human being (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As it is people who normally give meaning to their social world, interpretive researchers seek to investigate how people perceive and make sense of their world. The research becomes the construction of meaning between participants (Thomas, 2010) and this implying participants provides their views in as much detail as they can and thus getting chance to express in their own words. Thus, the study sought to draw its orientation from the perspective of the labour market expectation for HR graduates.

The rationale for the application of this paradigm is based on the fact that it helps researchers to have a better understanding of social life from the point of view of those being studied (Abbott, 2010). The core focus of interpretivism as a theoretical framework, therefore, is based on the assumption that social actors generate meaningful constructs of the social world in which they operate (Blaikie, 2007). This could be through unstructured observation, unstructured interviews, and personal documents as well as open-ended research questions (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007). Furthermore, the research paradigm or theoretical framework in this study sought to derive meaning from newly appointed HR professionals – in terms of searching which HR competencies are relevant for the world of work, and the various ways of viewing the world in specific contexts. This framework involves the interpretation of elements of the study as interpretivism, which normally integrates human interest into a phenomenon under study. In order to underpin the latter statement, Myers (2009) further maintains that in qualitative research, qualitative data

sources include a variety of sources as methods of data-collection – and these include observation and participant observation as part of fieldwork, questionnaires, documents and text. It is from the latter data-collection methods and tools that the study made inferences and could draw conclusions.

Furthermore, Myers (2008:38) holds that the premise of interpretivism research is that access to reality is only through social constructions like language, whereby meaning is derived. Thus, according to Myers (2009), studies associated with interpretivism research base their argument on the fact that the interpretivism approach relies on language, consciousness, shared meaning, and instruments. Furthermore, according to Collins (2010:38) it is stated that:

*Interpretivism associated with the philosophical position of idealism, and is used to group together diverse approaches, including social constructionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics; approaches that reject the objectivist view that meaning resides within the world independently of consciousness.*

This would imply that interpretivism does focus on finding meaning – and that leads to a certain situation that prevails at a given time. According to Myers (2009), philosophical assumptions in research may be classified as positivist, interpretivism and critical. Therefore, all research is based on some underlying philosophical assumption about what constitutes valid research and which research method is appropriate for the development of knowledge in a given study.

This study is underpinned by an interpretivism philosophical assumption. According to Schwandt (1994:118), an interpretivism approach tends to give more insight into “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it”. Thus, interpretivism research assumes that reality is socially constructed, and the researcher becomes the vehicle by which reality is revealed (Cavan, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001; Walsham, 1995a, b). This approach is consistent with the construction of the social world characterised by interaction between the researcher and the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

## 1.5. PROBLEM STATEMENT, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The problem statement for this study is constructed on the basis that there is apparently the challenge of a lack of relevant curricular content that ensures that HR graduates are well trained in terms of the latest global trends that address the needs of contemporary organisations. The revised HR curricula that ensure responsiveness, and also the programme planning, are the focal issues in this study. Česnyienė, Diskiene and Stankeviciene (2013:123) have the following to say about the development of competencies among HR professionals:

*Along with the transformation of the labour market, human resource management is going through the phase of evaluation of its own activities, objectives, and is considering the survival dilemma. Therefore, the present situation requires human resource departments to act in a more mature manner, to develop the necessary competences of the specialists.*

The above statement poses an organic challenge to higher education institutions – as the prevalent question would be whether HR graduates emerge sufficiently trained and equipped with the requisite set of skills, know-how techniques and attributes to ensure they are competent to play a significant role in organisations. The HR profession clearly faces a challenge that needs attention and they need to demonstrate this fact (Benko, Bohdal-Spiegelhoff, Geller & Walkinshaw (2014). Furthermore, Schwartz, Bersin and Pelsler (2014: 8) aver that:

*The third urgent issue is the reskilling of HR. This finding suggests that the HR and talent functions are in the midst of a transformation. HR is not making the grade as companies move away from HR as people administration, to a focus on people performance. An essential part of this change is the up skilling, reorganisation, and transformation of HR and its relationship with business leaders and issues.*

According to Schultz (2010:1) there is a need for HR to acquire competencies that will enable professionals and departments alike, to perform at improved levels and further add value at both operational and strategic levels. According to Schultz (2010:1), HR competencies need to be identified and developed, and thus “*HR management*

*involves becoming a business partner and plays a significant part in developing business strategy*". This implies the need for HR to be more responsive, in terms of providing solutions to organisational challenges that are being created by evolving and complex global trends. As a result, HR professionals need to be ahead of the game – by grasping complex technological shifts and preparing accordingly. This is where the importance of the development of key HR competencies for the advancement of organisations is necessary, and needs to be placed at a high premium as new requisite skills and training for HR professionals are imperative. Higher education institutions will need to find out and assess, through research, the new skills that are globally recognised – particularly in technology development. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2014), argues that *'...the skills and education of the millennials who remain in the workforce must always be relevant and attractive to employers'*". Therefore, higher education institutions will need to reform educational curricula and programmes, and prepare the future workforce for employment opportunities. According to the 2012 Higher Education, HR is central in terms of assisting organisations to realise goals and strategic objectives. HR further drives the talent agenda and shapes the culture to achieve the organisations' vision and mission.

In order to illustrate the higher education challenges further, the role of HR curricula also play a significant part in ensuring that graduates are properly trained and equipped with requisite skills, knowledge and attributes for the world of work. The South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) – an internationally recognised professional body for the HR profession that is tasked to ensure the transformation, professionalism, training and retaining talent in South Africa – declared that:

*The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that HR practitioners have different levels of competence. The different philosophies of universities and learning providers contributed to the problem, given the fact that some institutions' HR curriculum are dominated by a psychological approach, while others adopted a more business approach, with the result that students exiting these institutions come from different academic backgrounds based on vastly different schools of thought. In many cases, these students had to be retrained according to the needs of the*

*organisation, and some companies even went as far to create their own corporate universities to train their own staff. Thus, the lack of a national HR standard was the main concern for the SABPP Board, and a dual strategy featuring two strategic projects was conceptualised to build the HR profession nationally.*

In addition, Ogude, Nel and Oosthuizen (as quoted in Maphosa, Mudzielwana and Netshifhefhe, 2014a) – assert that globally competitive skills compel our higher education institutions to consider engagement in terms of curriculum debates – to ensure they match worldwide standards. Thus, the necessity to ensure that our higher education curricula help to produce highly skilled graduates – is key in terms of enabling them to play a meaningful role in the economy, becoming employable after years of study, as well as in shaping their skills to be more responsive to the socio-economic needs of the country.

In elucidating the importance of the developed curricula, Thacker (2002:1) also asserts that the impetus for HR curriculum change emanated from the realisation that developments and changes in the HR profession were not encapsulated in higher education HR curricula and programmes. The assertion in the foregoing paragraph exemplifies the fact that there is a missing link between higher education HR curricula and the expectation of the labour market or the world of work.

Wilton (2010:90) made a similar observation when he commented that:

*In order to achieve its strategic objective, a fundamental concern for an organisation is to ensure that it has the right people with the right skills, knowledge and attributes in the appropriate positions.*

### **1.5.1. Research questions**

The following main research question was formulated to guide the study: *How should a Human Resource Management programme at the University of Technology (UoT) be planned to incorporate the expectations of the labour market?*

To support the above-mentioned main research question, the following subsidiary questions were subsequently formulated:

- 1) What are the expectations of the labour market in terms of the readiness of HR graduates at a University of Technology– globally and nationally?
- 2) What are the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the employer community with regard to the job-readiness of HR graduates at a University of Technology?
- 3) What implications do the experiences, perceptions and expectations of the employer community, with regard to HR graduates, have for programme planning and improvement at -a University of Technology?
- 4) How should a programme be planned and developed for the training and development of HR students at a University of Technology, which will fulfil the expectations of the employer community/labour market?

### **1.5.2. Research objectives**

In order to realise the aim of this study – to investigate the views of the labour market in terms of the relevance of the current state of human resource academic programmes – the preparedness of HR graduates and identifying recommended HRM core curriculum content areas to aid the progress of the human resource profession in its endeavour to add value to the world of business, drove the following four objectives:

- 1) Determining the expectations of the labour market in terms of the readiness of HR graduates – globally and nationally.
- 2) Reflecting on the experiences, perceptions and experiences of the employer community regarding the job readiness of HR graduates.
- 3) Determining the implications, experiences, perceptions and expectations of the employer community regarding HR graduates in relation to programme planning at HEIs.
- 4) Proposing programme guidelines for the training and development of HR students at higher education institutions, which will fulfil the expectations of the employer community/ labour market.

## **1.6. VALUE OF THE STUDY FOR INSTITUTIONS AND THE LABOUR MARKET**

The active involvement of the labour market in the revamping and planning process of the HEIs programmes and core curriculum is vital (Rogers-Chapman & Darling-Hammond, 2013). The crux of the matter is to connect the curriculum to real-world experiences and this would require HEIs to work closer with the industry. The labour market is much more likely to support an educational initiative such as a new degree programme or a revamped curriculum if they have a first-hand role in a well-designed planning process. Rogers-Chapman and Darling-Hammond (2013) further avers that the curriculum and programme of learning should be able to prepare students for a future in either university or workplace by connecting learning in the classroom with the real-world applications in the workplace. Furthermore, the research by Kamp, Black and Abbott (2014) argued the fact that the investment in education should focus on aspects such as relevant curriculum and integrated career related activity.

Thus, the value of this study would focus on the responsiveness of the HEIs to the needs of the labour market and the preparedness of the HR students for the world of work in terms of identifying the requisite HR competencies. Ulrich and Brockbank (2013:90) posit that “influence with impact occurs when HR professionals start with the beliefs and goals of the receivers.” Therefore, the key to the success of any organisation is the realisation of building a good team of working professionals, and properly trained HR professionals. In order to illustrate the value of the study, the researcher focuses on both the institution and the labour market.

### **1.6.1. Institutions of higher education**

The literature review chapter will indicate clearly that the bar has been raised for education in HR (SHRM: 2010). Furthermore, Ulrich (2015) avers: “If HR professionals are truly to contribute to business performance, then their mind-set must centre on the goals of the business”. The best talent in HR is sought by contemporary organisations, and enhancement of HR education is the appropriate vehicle for the improved performance of HR professionals. This calls for institutions of higher education to research and review their teaching and learning strategies and offer responsive

curricula and programmes that address the needs of the labour market. The review of HR curricula and programmes is believed to be the best way to assist and support HR professionals to be empowered to align their work with employer requirements, and to add value to the growth and sustenance of businesses in a competitive world of work (Vasitha & Chauhan, 2011). In illustrating that the role of HR and its impact have evolved over the past two decades, Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank and Ulrich (2012:6), in the book titled *HR from the outside in: Six competencies for the future of human resources*, contend that HR has indeed transformed and evolved through different 'waves' of development. These are:

- *HR Administration* – Emphasis on the administrative and transactional work by HR.
- *HR Practices* – Innovation in specialised areas of HR (i.e. compensation, recruitment, training).
- *HR Strategy* – Integration of HR and business practices.
- *HR Outside-In* – HR moves beyond strategy to align its work with business context and stakeholders.

In *HR from the Outside In* (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012), authors endeavour to articulate what HR professionals worldwide have on their minds, and make serious efforts to shape the minds of HR practitioners to understand the value they are required to add to organisations – in order to support their organisations' strategic goals. The important role that higher education institutions need to play, is to provide insightful curricula and programmes that will enhance the knowledge and skills of HR graduates – who are preparing to perform competently in the world of work (Carmichael, 2012). Clearly, higher education has a significant role to play in graduates' preparedness, and Carmichael (2012) posits the following: "People are coming out of university or business school with an HR qualification and they know they need to gain experience. They are bringing more to the table".

### **1.6.2. Labour market**

The evolution of HRM is compelling HR professionals to play a strategic role (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Therefore, HR professionals need to acquire relevant skills and

competencies that will enable them to operate at a strategic level. Vickers (2007) purports that:

*It is imperative for the human resource professionals to acquire the knowledge and set of skills and attributes to master their work and make a valuable contribution to their organisations.*

Furthermore, the literature (e.g. Brewster, Sparrow & Vernon, 2007) indicates that the HR profession has seen some progress and development, even though there is room for improvement that would assist HR professionals to deliver according to the expectation of the world of work. Sareen and Subramanian (2012) maintain that the HR profession recently has become under tremendous pressure to deliver and support the strategic thrust of the organisation. Their function needs to be aligned with the business strategy of the organisation for which they work, in order to ensure the realisation of organisational objectives (Holbeche, 2012). Furthermore, Ulrich *et al.* (2012:1) declare that:

*If HR professionals are truly to contribute to business performance, then their mind-set must center on the goals of the business. They must take that outside reality and bring it into everything they do, practising their craft with an eye to the business as a whole and not just their own department.*

This clearly emphasises that the HR profession needs to continue vigorously with introspection on how they can offer support to organisations for which they work, as the expectations of the labour market have changed and have broadened horizons in terms of what they anticipate to get from the HR profession (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Since the bar has been raised for HR, HR professionals must pull out all the stops, and create and deliver value in real business terms (Ingram, 2007).

In supporting the above arguments, Timms (2013) posits that HR professionals must consider being multi-disciplinary figures in an organisation – with the aim of gaining recognition. The general knowledge in terms of the functioning of the company, is considered key by contemporary organisations (Timms, 2013). In underpinning his argument, Timms (2013:27) avers that there are certain skills that HR professionals must have in the operation of their duties, which include:

- *Adopt the parlance of the part of the business you are with at that time:* HR professionals should garner skills that will make them understand what is happening in various components of the organisations – so as to be able to give advice where necessary.
- *Understand the customer's perspective:* Understanding the customer's perspective is always crucial, and as the saying goes, the "*customer is always right*". Gaining a clear understanding of what the customer expects is a key factor in making the organisation relevant and responsive to the needs of its customers.
- *Knowledge of numbers:* The traditional trend in the past was that HR professionals need not have knowledge of numbers. The contemporary organisation and general practice dictate that HR professional should have a clear understanding of issues around budgets, investment capital and operational spending that affects organisations and their operations.
- *Be the futurologist in the boardroom:* This implies clear prediction of what the markets deem necessary, and also to understand the trends, developments and ever-changing strategies that the competitive world could use in the market.
- *Get scientific:* Having a scientific understanding and knowing the facts that may help the direction of an organisation, based on scientific evidence and information, are imperative for the future success and sustenance of the business.
- *Be an analyst and practise 'people-nomics':* Having a people orientation is critically important for HR professionals in many aspects of their daily functioning. This includes employees' performance or lack thereof, rewarding employees for excellence at work, and regularly briefing them on the rationale for excellence in production. Incentives related to reaching targets are also imperative.
- *Become part of the creative hub:* HR professionals need to immerse extensively in creativity initiatives that enhance the chances of the organisations in terms of attracting more business and helping the business to sustain its existence in the midst of fierce competition. HR professionals must be associated with developments such as technology used by the business, new products introduced to the market, and involvement in research and development activities – which will only be achieved if HR professionals have insight into the organisation and its niche market.

## **1.7. RESEARCH DESIGN**

In qualitative research, the coverage of research design is mostly limited to frequently used forms such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell, 2014). The grounded theory, which is a theory derived from analysing qualitative data, involves the progressive identification and integration of categories of meaning from data (Creswell, 2014). The grounded, as applied in the study, draws its orientation from the premise of an interaction grounded in the views of participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the grounded theory would be realised via multiple stages of data collection and its refinement as based on the perceptions of HR practitioners regarding the expertise, knowledge, skills set and competencies as requisite qualities needed for HR contemporary HR professionals (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2013; Creswell, 2007). The study applied the grounded theory as interpretations in this inquiry are derived from raw data. (Creswell, 2014 & Creswell, 2013). The HR qualities emerged as participants voiced their views and perceptions on what is deemed to be relevant for a competent and well-versed HR professional in the labour market. The use of qualitative methods such as the literature review, the data analysis from documents and open-ended questionnaire to gather information on requisite HR qualities further defined research questions. The grounded theory, as a research design for the study, was further used in the process of developing themes. The themes developed as a result of reading the text and coding specific examples of aspects where participants mentioned frequently emerging HR qualities for contemporary HR professionals. In this study coding is understood and interpreted as the process of reviewing notes that would enable the discovery of common themes.

Given the assertion in the foregoing paragraph, it is clear that grounded theory is relevant as it is continually used to revise all phases of data collected for the study- this implying that all categories of data on HR qualities were continually clustered to derive at themes that yielded main HR competencies. While the end result of a grounded theory study was meant to generate some broad themes, the researcher is

not making an attempt to generalize the study in the same objective way characteristic of quantitative research. In Schurink (2004d:2), it is averred that

*‘that grounded theory is a particular inductive approach consisting of a systematically developed set of procedures and techniques to devise a theoretical concept about the life world of some selected group of people who form part of a particular social reality’.*

The grounded theory, a qualitative research design in this study, is seen as an open approach to research, which allows the researcher to develop themes based on the data collected versus traditional methodology techniques of merely basing data on previously existing theories. The benefits of applying grounded theory as a research design for this study is premised around the fact that it includes the freedom apportioned to participants to convey freely their views without any constraints and allows what is relevant to emerge (Burden & Roodt, 2007).

In the case of this research, engagement with participants via questionnaire and perusing advertisements and going through the literature review gathering data on requisite HR qualities provided the study with a vast understanding of what it takes to achieve the goal of successful being a competent HR professional in contemporary organisations. Furthermore, the question on how to provide a continuous flow of high quality academic research in HR management must be increasingly be seen as a vital mechanism for transferring expertise out of universities into society and the broader world of work. To this end, the study has made an attempt to address important issues concerning the application of grounded theory and its relevance to HR management research. The thrust and focus was mainly on the feasibility of grounded theory as a design on HR management research with emphasis on the objective of providing an understanding of this established approach in social sciences for qualitative data analysis. The purpose has been to identify the foundations of this research and its implications in the HR management research.

### **1.7.1. Research methodology**

The methodology of the study refers to the way in which data are collected in order to answer the research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). A qualitative approach was followed – using a literature review, document analysis and an open-ended questionnaire as data-collection methods.

### **1.7.2. The qualitative approach in the study**

The study approach was based on qualitative research – the rationale being that this approach provides an understanding of human experience, perception and behaviours (Creswell & Clark, 2007). This understanding usually is based on study participants' opinions, ideas and the meaning they give to constructs. Berg (2009) affirms that qualitative research is based on description, observation and sometimes even documents for data collection – from which inferences are made. According to Silverman (2011), qualitative methods utilise a naturalistic, interpretative approach to a subject in its contextual setting. Qualitative research also assumes that there are many different ways of understanding and of making sense of the world.

In the research, the focus was on the participants' experiences of and perspectives on HR professionals. To ensure an unbiased perspective, the researcher got involved in the study by consulting the latest literature on the trends and developments in the field of HR. The propensity of curricula to determine the impact that HR professionals have on organisations' success, became the focal point of the study – as it significantly clarified the trends in the evolution of HR, its teaching, and the impact it has on organisations. As Streubert and Carpenter (2002:56) put it, the researcher's role in the study adds to the uniqueness of data collection and analysis, as more insight and in-depth knowledge can thus be gained. Complete objectivity was impossible, as qualitative methodology is not completely precise – because human beings do not always act logically or predictably (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

Another reason for using a qualitative approach was that it allowed the researcher to explore and describe the opinions of the employer community on the requisite HR qualities, such as skills and knowledge and other attributes.

### **1.7.3. Data-collection instruments**

In qualitative research, a wide variety of methods may be used to collect data. For the purpose of the study, the researcher applied three methods: a literature review, document analysis, and an open-ended questionnaire.

#### **1.7.3.1. Literature review**

The literature review was used as a method to collect data about the HR qualities needed by the world of work. Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2012) noted that a literature review or search is considered as another method of data gathering, and is not merely to gain an in-depth background on the topic. This confirms that data collected from a literature search result in findings that provide an invaluable insight into the phenomenon being studied. In using the data collected through the literature review, the researcher synthesised a number of HR qualities that various research studies considered as fundamental and relevant for HR professionals in the execution of their strategic assignments.

#### **1.7.3.2. Document analysis**

Document analysis is applied in the study as a method, by means of which the content of collected material is used as a basis for drawing inferences and making conclusions about the phenomenon under study (*cf.* Mayring, 2014). In this study, the document analysis method was used for the analysis of HR requirements needed in the job market and newspaper repository at various library centres were visited to achieve the goal of collecting data via this method. Bowen (2009) confirmed documents as a source of data in qualitative research that can yield useful information for analysis purposes. This is often applied as a text interpretation method of qualitative research.

The document analysis method was applied with the purpose of collecting, processing and interpreting data to identify relevant and similar HR requirements of different organisations in the job market.

In order to discover the most sought-after HR job attributes in the world of work, the researcher identified specific job websites displaying vacancies advertised in all the provinces of South Africa. The information collected thus also included HR requirements of international organisations that run operations in South Africa. A search of specific job requirements that most employers required of HR graduates and professionals in the field of HR, was also done.

#### **1.7.3.3. Open-ended Questionnaire**

Open-ended questionnaires are among the most common methods used in research, and Brown (2006) avers that are written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers. The purpose of the open-ended questionnaire in this study is to enable the researcher to elicit information, profile it after the collection and then generate meaningful findings out of it. In this study, the open-ended questionnaire comprised specific questions that were aimed at gathering information from the labour market about what the participants perceived as HR requirements and capabilities. Halterman (2012:1) asserts that questionnaires are “legitimate and essential instruments for research and data gathering”. The researcher used the data gathered via the open-ended questionnaire to identify and formulate specific themes.

#### **1.7.4. Data analysis**

Data collected via literature search, the document analysis and the open-ended questionnaire, were ordered, categorised, interpreted and analysed to determine the employer community’s needs in terms of competencies, skills and knowledge required for training of HR graduates – and this included the required attributes of HR graduates

as well. The findings of the analysed and interpreted data collected via the three methods exemplified above provided an insight into the employer community's experiences of HR graduates. The process of identifying relevant HR advertisements entailed the selection of the most relevant and appropriate websites that displayed HR jobs as well as the newspaper repository search. Online recruitment websites such as [www.careers24.com](http://www.careers24.com), [www.hireresolve.co.za](http://www.hireresolve.co.za) and [www.pnet.co.za](http://www.pnet.co.za), the newspaper repository that advertised HR jobs were found most useful for data gathering, as they were recent, covered a wide spectrum of organisations and positions in HR, and were fairly easily accessible. The open-ended questionnaire further provided more useful data on requisite HR qualities and requirements as needed by the labour market. Subsequent to this, a thorough processing of HR requirements, as they appeared in the latter methods of data collection, provided a sense of most wanted HR requirements that the job market identified as essential in the execution of tasks.

#### **1.7.5. Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used as a sampling method. In Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hoagwood (2015:1), it is averred that purposeful sampling is 'widely used as a qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich case related to the phenomenon of interest'. In applying the principle of purposeful sampling, the study purposefully selected participant from the employers that had placed advertisements recruiting HR professionals. This sample of HR employers comprised 1 393 participants that represented the population. They had the same important features that served as criteria for selection: they were employers wanting to hire, or had hired HR professionals who had recently graduated with HR qualifications. The population from which the participants were drawn made use of a newspaper repository as well as specific job websites that advertised HR vacancies. A search for an archived repository of newspapers that advertised HR vacancies became a useful and essential source of data. This was an information on advertised HR positions. In addition to the archived repository of newspapers that advertised HR positions, numerous online recruitment websites where HR jobs were advertised were searched, and this included websites such as [www.careers24.com](http://www.careers24.com), [www.hireresolve.co.za](http://www.hireresolve.co.za) and [www.pnet.co.za](http://www.pnet.co.za). The advanced search features that

allowed a search for jobs in specific groups or regions, and even sites that went down to the level of industry and sector, proved to be valuable tools in the process. The sample was selected on the premise that they formed part of the labour market that employed HR graduates over the past five years. This process implied that participants were chosen based on their position, knowledge and/or experience – which was aimed with the purpose of yielding information that could add to the value of the study (*cf.* Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The purpose of the sampling exercise was to get a representative sample of HR employers as participants in the study.

#### **1.7.6. Validity and reliability**

In this study, the type of validity used is internal validity – as this refers the extent to which the design and data yielded allowed the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause-and-effect within the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2009:133; Creswell & Plano Clark 2011:416). Validation of the data under normal circumstances is achieved when the rich description of the participants and context from which they have been located, are justified (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). The development of the data-collection instruments was underpinned by an in-depth theoretical base which had been established prior to designing the instruments – by means of the literature review on the phenomenon being studied.

Using three methods – a literature review/search, documents analysis and the open-ended question survey – resulted in the triangulation of the data, and, as a result, the validation of findings (*cf.* Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). This process provided for different methods to yield valuable results that could be verified (*cf.* Golafshani, 2003).

In this qualitative research, reliability also has been interpreted as having to do with trustworthiness. This implies using a credible instrument that has a bearing on the

accuracy of data collected – that is the degree to which multiple implementations of the instrument would yield the same results (Delpont, 2002:168). The study researcher applied triangulation in the data-collection process to ensure reliability of data and findings.

## **1.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Since the study involved human participants, it was imperative that it should be carried out in accordance with high ethical standards. Ethical issues in the research were addressed by gaining informed consent from and acting with responsibility towards the participants (*cf.* Halai, 2007). This required informing participants about the overall purpose of the research and its main features, as well as the risks and benefits of participation. Consent had to be given in written format by the participants and the researcher ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by not revealing their identities when analysing and interpreting the data, and also in reporting results. Although the participants' email addresses were known to the researcher, these were not captured during the processing of the data, and no other personal information was divulged in reporting the results. The questionnaires were processed anonymously – thus ensuring the respondents' confidentiality.

## **1.9. DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY**

The area of study for this research falls within the scope of higher education. According to Pouris (2014) and OECD (2008), higher education is a field of study that contributes to social and economic development, through the enhancement of human capital through teaching. As such, this study contributes to the development of management science – which in turn contributes to social and economic development.

The findings of the research, first and foremost, are aimed at benefitting the institution concerned and its HR students. The population from which the sample was selected, however, stretches much wider and involved employers of HR graduates, regardless of where these graduates have completed their studies. The study therefore, covered

the scope of HR graduates – rather than concentrating on graduates from higher education institutions in South Africa. The population that will benefit from the outcome of the study, includes HR employers, HE institutions, and students studying in the field of HR.

## 1.10. STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

The study report is structured as follows:

<b>Labour Market Expectation of a University of Technology’s graduates in Human Resource Management: Implications for Programme Planning</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>
<b><i>Background and orientation: Setting the scene</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Background to the study</li> <li>▪ Approach and design</li> <li>▪ Statement of the problem and aim and objectives of the investigation</li> <li>▪ Methodology, research methods, and sampling</li> <li>▪ Validity and reliability</li> <li>▪ Value of the research</li> <li>▪ Demarcation of the field of study</li> </ul>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>
<b><i>A conceptual framework on the evolution of HR competencies</i></b>
<p>A background on HR evolution and the manner in which it impacts on higher education HR training is provided, and the following aspects will be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theories relevant to the study and their impact on HR</li> <li>• Relevance of higher education and the career-orientated programmes</li> <li>• Evolution of Human Resource Management</li> <li>• Transition from Personnel Management to Strategic Human Resource Management</li> <li>• The University types in South Africa</li> <li>• Role of a curriculum</li> <li>• HR and the workplace environment</li> </ul>

- The concept of HR competency models

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### ***Literature review on the concept of HR competency models***

A scrutiny of HR competency models enabled the researcher to compile a theoretical framework, defining HR competency in the workplace, and with particular reference to:

- World views on different HR models and practices
- The South African context.
- Synthesis of HR competencies

### **CHAPTER 4**

#### ***Research design and Methodology***

Exposition of the methodology applied in this investigation:

- Defining methodology and methods applied in the study
- Data-collection methods: literature review, document analysis, and open-ended question survey
- Clarification of sampling methods
- Elucidation of data-collection instruments and methods
- Data collection, processing, and analysis
- Interpretation and discussion of data

### **CHAPTER 5**

#### ***Presentation, analysis and interpretation of results***

This chapter compares theory to practice by looking into the employer community's experiences in relation to HR competency theories:

- Overview of the realisation of the objectives of the study in terms of exploring HR competencies and their development
- Interpretation of analysed data
- Study results
- Findings

### **CHAPTER 6**

#### ***Conclusion, limitations and recommendations***

- Discussion of implications with respect to HR training programmes
- Providing suggestions on programme planning for HR for the training of prospective HR professionals
- Recommendations
- Limitations of the research

### **1.11. CONCLUSION**

This chapter gave an exposition of the background and the rationale for the investigation as well as the research design. The central focus of the study is on understanding what perceptions do the labour market have with regard to the requisite HR requirements, namely the knowledge, competencies and skills sets that can help the HR profession to add value to the strategic thrust of the organisations as well as the implication of the HR requisite qualities on the development of HR curricula and the planning and design of programmes.

## *Chapter Two*

### *A conceptual framework on the evolution of HR competencies*

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

The emphasis on this chapter forms the basis for a conceptual framework. This primarily provides conception and theoretical account on the HR evolution as a phenomenon under study and the discipline that culminated to its strategic prominence in organisations. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), Robson (2011), a conceptual framework for the study is about the system of concepts, expectations and theories that support and informs research. In addition, Huberman (1994), avers that the conceptual framework provides a visual account that narratively explains the main component of the study. Therefore, this chapter endeavours to identify a set of skills, knowledge and competencies that the labour market regards as imperative to enable HR graduates to significantly contribute to the strategic goals of the organisation and the achievement of objectives, is reported on. The study therefore taps into various studies that provide a comprehensive account of the HR evolution since the Industrial Revolution era to the present strategic thrust on the role of HR in a contemporary organisation.

#### **2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

HR professionals have evolved from a behind-the-scenes administrative role in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to active involvement in contributing towards the strategic role that impacts on the mission, vision, strategic goal, and the organisational objectives of organisations (Lawler & Boudreau, 2006). As the evolution continuously takes place, there is also consistent change in the nature of the world of work (SHRM Foundation, 2014:6-9). It is imperative to realise that this demand points to the role of education – and higher education in particular. The higher education (HE) sector has a uniquely important role in terms of resolving the persistent skills shortage in South Africa, by producing qualified graduates and postgraduates (de Pre, 2009). For decades, universities have defined academic quality in terms of inputs, student and academic

staff quality, resources, and facilities – rather than outputs like student performance. Rethinking the core academic functions of a university requires a shift in perspective from resources to results.

A fundamental and recurring challenge to higher education programmes is that the ever-evolving changes in the labour market demand that the HR curricula be reviewed and aligned with the needs of the contemporary organisation (Madsen, 2003:1; Ogude, Nel & Oosthuizen, 2005; Mkhonto, 2007). Madsen (2003:1) noted that academic programmes need to “reflect current research findings and job market needs and competencies”. This calls for institutions of higher education to develop degree programmes that are responsive to the needs of the labour market (Madsen, 2003). Thus, new programmes need to be designed to reflect the graduate qualities needed, and also the needs of the labour market. Kuchinke (2001), in Madsen, Musto and Hall (2003:15), also explained that in “responding to the increasing demand for employee skills, expertise, and performance in rapidly changing economic and social environments, many universities have implemented academic programs to educate and train ... practitioners ...”. This clearly indicates that it is vital that new university programmes be designed such that they reflect current research findings and the needs and competencies of the labour market.

Programme offerings at higher education institutions should take cognisance of recent research exposing the needs and expectations of the labour market. Mkhonto (2007) asserts that, in the 21st Century, higher education curricula should be changed and respond to the external environment. Hence, this study seeks to find the most requisite HR qualities – such as knowledge, skills and attributes required by the contemporary employer community. According to Lee (2002), academic programmes are increasingly important for success in the field of HR, and therefore the goal of the study is to identify the HR qualities needed that should be incorporated in the HR curriculum. The rationale for the study is to respond to the needs of the labour market; the HRM discipline and the curriculum must become a true reflection of the core knowledge areas identified by the employer community.

It is, therefore, no wonder that HR courses – once found only in universities – now are offered at most tertiary institutions. HRM educational programmes demonstrate the same mix of continuity and change as the practice of HRM in industry. The performance of core tasks, however, has been transformed since the first personnel departments were established in the late 1910s (Kaufman, 2007). Lepak, Bartol and Erhardt (2005:140) argue that over the past two decades, the HRM function also has been challenged to take up a new direction, in terms of its role that supports the organisation. The HR profession has been challenged to contribute in terms of a more strategic role in organisations. This involves new employment laws, reorganised methods of work design and management – as well as assistance in achieving success in the competing environment of enterprises. The traditional function of HR that comprised hiring, administration of policies, and selection of employees, has changed drastically and has forced HR to respond to the needs of the organisation so as to contribute in its strategic direction (Ulrich, 1996). HRM educational programmes demonstrate the same responsiveness to change, and have evolved in ways that reflect new skills (Bratton & Gold, 2012).

Hammonds (2005:42) and Bolton and Storr (2006) criticise HR on the failure to perform according to the expected role and state that HR needs to justify its existence and fulfil delivery on strategic promises. They maintain that HR largely concentrates on individual needs and neglects the bigger picture of the organisation. On the other hand, HR bodies exist with a view to promoting the profession, in order for HR professionals to gain recognition and appropriate respect – that will help them gain leverage in organisations. HR needs to have a strategic understanding of the business and the competitive environment in which it operates (Missildine, 2015; Lawler & Boudreau, 2012). The acceptance of HR professionals as being equal partners, participating in strategic decisions of an organisation, is due to the overhaul of the profession; new competencies and skills are in line with the management of business leadership and strategy (Missildine, 2015). This clearly demonstrates that the HR profession must enhance credibility by becoming more proficient in strategic and business competencies. This calls for newly researched knowledge on what HR

professionals should know and be able to do, in order to earn respect, space and recognition from the contemporary labour market.

### **2.3. THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

According to Chimoga (2014):

*the evolution of Human Resource Management has progressed through the ages from times when people were abused in slavery working conditions to the modern environment where people are valued and respected and viewed as strategic partners to business.*

The nature and characteristics of human resource management (HRM) have continuously evolved, because of the latest labour demands related to changing needs in the world of work. The recent era has seen significant development that spawned enormous challenges in the business world (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). Organisations are continuously confronted by massive changes which are beyond their internal control. These challenges ensued from globalisation, technological advances, ever-changing demands of the market and competitive market forces – as well as global economies (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Enormous demands are made on organisations in terms of new strategic directions and internal operations, as a result of these changes.

The HR profession has to keep up-to-date with the latest trends, as organisations depend on HR professionals to play their role in integrating the HR strategy of advancing the performance of the organisation (Paauwe, Guest, & Wright, 2013; Bal, 2011). The rapid pace of change – coupled with information overload – makes planning for the future a daunting task for organisations. HR professionals have a compelling duty to play a strategic role and to help organisations to tackle challenges like organisational culture, and even technological trends, that all affect business. The world has become a global village and this has led to emerging new markets that offer new challenges and opportunities to organisations, and also to HR professionals (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009). A natural consequence of these changes and developments, is that the employer community (EC) persistently demands that HEIs

produce human resource (HR) graduates that are equipped with the necessary competencies – to face these new challenges (Chimoga, 2014). According to Norhaug (2004), organisations that wish to gain an advantage over their competitors are compelled to invest in the development of their employees, as this contributes to the better performance of the organisation.

### **2.3.1. The Industrial Revolution era (±1760 to ±1840)**

The evolution of HRM began during the industrial revolution era that started mainly in the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA) (Tubey, Rotich & Kurat, 2015). HRM as science and profession essentially had its origins in the industrial revolution (Schroeder, 2013). During the Industrial Revolution, organisations had personnel departments that merely focused on the administration of remuneration (wages) and some dealt with employee wellness. Gilbertson (1965), Megginson (1972), and Jamrog and Overholt (2004), trace the evolution of HR over a period of almost a century. Over years, various changes in industry have led to different roles and responsibilities being assigned to HR practitioners. These changes, according to Jamrog and Overholt (2004), ensued from the Industrial Revolution period that saw the dawn of labour movements or unions in organisations.

Several reasons exist as to why the Industrial Revolution brought about developments in the field of HR (Cascio, 1992). During this era, developments like steam power and machinery were introduced, and the use of physical labour decreased tremendously. However, despite this decrease, the developments attracted huge numbers of job seekers that flocked to industrialised areas in search of job opportunities. These developments led to the improved production of goods. During this time, personnel management came into being (Cascio, 1992). As a result of the major shift that occurred from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy – effective recruitment methods for searching for and retaining skilful workers had to be put in place. This was seen as the inception of labour management (Bach & Sisson, 2000; Duiker & Spielvogel, 2010). This development evidently provoked the need for an organised form of personnel management (PM) system.

During the Industrial Revolution, factories were introduced and this development resulted in an increase in rules and regulations relating to the workplace (Ling, 1965; Megginson, 1972). The concept of organisational structure and the new organisational design concept was also introduced and/or introduced (Lesmana: n.d.:1). At the same time, the notion of the specialised organisation of work came into existence, and workers became more aware of their rights in the workplace. Historical challenges related to abuse at the workplace, especially the exploitation of children, were challenged by the labour movements that came into being, in the form of organised trade unions. The labour movements had an element of violence, and proliferated rapidly in industry as people became aware of their rights as workers (Cohen, 1960).

### **2.3.2. The 1900s and beyond**

The second Industrial Revolution – that also became known as the Technological Revolution – was ushered in as an extension of the larger Industrial Revolution during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, between 1840 and 1860 (Mokyr, 1993). A new function in organisations, the personnel department, was introduced in the 1920s and was responsible for HR responsibilities like employment welfare, finance, housing, medical and educational needs, wages, health and safety, training and other health-related issues (Jamrog & Overholt, 2014:51).

The development of these personnel departments, as introduced in the 1920s, came amidst challenges that had to be tackled. Kahnweiler (2006) identified some of the challenges faced by HR professionals as: lack of power, walking a tightrope, dealing with sceptical customers who viewed HR negatively, and vulnerability. Jamrog and Overholt (2004: 51) provide a historical account of the HR evolution, and state that: “During the ‘30s, ‘40s and ‘50s the profession was enhanced by the human relations movement as well as academic and applied disciplines from behavioural sciences and system theory.”

After World War II, a shortage of skilled labour emerged and the labour market had to refocus more on the workers' needs (Bach & Sisson, 2000). The intensified competition in labour acquisition resulted in employers realising that the task of effective personnel management was urgent (Bach & Sisson, 2000). The personnel management function came about as a result of the need for companies and organisations to comply with legislation – and having to adjust the ways in which they were managing their personnel. Initially, personnel management dealt with keeping records and the implementation of policies. Additional tasks like personnel recruitment, staff training, employee welfare and housing needs, then came into existence. Personnel management was conceptualised mainly to deal with trade unions and to solve industrial disputes through collective bargaining methods. The other function performed by personnel management was performance appraisals that were meant to determine remuneration and promotions at the workplace. The personnel management (PM) approach aimed to convince workers of business's interests, and management of the workers' interest and organisation's social obligations.

Personnel management thus did not have to make a meaningful contribution to the strategy of an organisation or firm – neither was personnel management a factor in the operational activities of organisations. As a result, PM remained focused on administrative matters during larger parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. From the 1970s on ward, however, the HR profession (at the time merely a PM function) underwent profound changes due to new developments that required HR managers or PM to respond to and align appropriately with industry, in order to serve organisations in a more efficient way. This was an indication of the resolute evolution route that the HR profession had taken at the time. These developments are cited as a result of the social, demographic, technological and economic factors that needed to be considered by the HR profession. The above factors caused management in organisations in the 1970s and 1980s to realise the crucial role that HR professionals could play in organisations – and this marked the advent of the new HR profession with a different role to play (Jamrog & Overholt, 2004).

Vosburgh (2013:131) also pointed to three challenges that HR professionals needed to deal with: sustainability, global challenges, and technological challenges. In addition to these challenges, the *Survey of Global HR Challenges: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (CBST, n.d.) – conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the World Federation of Personnel Management Association (WFPMA) – revealed distinct 21<sup>st</sup> Century HR challenges as:

- Change management (48%)
- Leadership development ((35%)
- HR effectiveness measurement (27%)
- Organisational effectiveness (25%).

This identification of 21<sup>st</sup> Century HR challenges clearly calls for HR to continuously check the relevance of its function and to ensure coherence with the overall strategic objectives of organisations (Garey, 2011). In the 1990s, a tremendous shift emerged in the role that the HR profession played. The top management in organisations realised the importance and crucial role that could be played by human resources in their companies. HR professionals were cautioned to take on a more strategic role that would support organisations in endeavours to achieve their strategic goals and objectives. From their side, HR professionals had to convince top management beyond a reasonable doubt that they could add value – and that they should be afforded a seat at the business table.

According to the study of Ferris, Perrewe, Ranfit, Zinko, Stoner, Brouer and Laird (2007) on the evolution of HR over distinct stages, the HR profession has undergone considerable changes of position since the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. HR plainly has stood the test of time and continuously strived to be at the forefront of developments – resisting challenges imposed by external and internal forces, such as globalisation, mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures and many other organisational changes (Smriti, n.d).

Although HR professionals today still sometimes struggle to get recognition, the HR profession clearly has made significant strides in terms of its evolution. HR professionals understand that they need to take responsibility for overall organisational effectiveness. To add value, HR professionals are required to understand their organisations' strategy, mission and vision – and work towards the realisation of the goals and strivings of organisations.

#### **2.4. TRANSITION FROM PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT TO HUMAN RESOURCES**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the dawn of personnel management that had an administrative role (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2014)). The need to apply statutory compliance processes defined personnel management in the early years. This primarily meant (as discussed earlier) – entrusting the personnel management department with responsibilities like record keeping and adherence to organisational policies. These functions, however, had to do with day-to-day administration and did not include pertinent issues that would contribute to the achievement of strategic organisational goals.

As indicated earlier in the chapter, HR gradually moved from the traditional administrative function towards becoming a fully-fledged strategic practice in organisations. Today HR encompasses many more responsibilities than the traditional functions that were administrative in nature, such as activities like filling out benefit and leave forms. HR responsibilities nowadays range from performing a strategic role like ensuring increased reliance on performance and linking compensation models to the cost-effectiveness of the organisation, through to monitoring the impact of employees' inputs on growth and sustainability. A new dimension added to HRM's responsibilities is the human capital development function and performance, and also talent management (Ivancevich, 2001:5).

HR appeared to have gained credibility and recognition, as organisations realised that employees were a strategic resource (Lawler, 2004; Lawler, 2005). It therefore

became apparent that the workforce had become an indispensable asset in organisations that strive to gain a competitive advantage over others (Lawler, 2004; Lawler, 2005). It also becomes imperative to utilise this fundamental resource optimally for the benefit of organisations (Ivancevich, 2001). This led organisations towards linking HR functions to the line-management function; and also repositioning HR to play a critical role in the core operations of the organisation.

In recent years, HR research, in general, clearly has suggested that academics and researchers mainly considered HR competencies to be crucial in addressing the needs of contemporary employers at the workplace (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2007; Friedman, 2009). This study, however, is primarily aimed at exploring HR competencies that add value to organisational strategic objectives – as well as to challenges that put pressure on HR to align its role with the organisation's goals (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Cognisance was taken of the global challenges related to technological and economic developments, changing labour market needs and the talent gap, globalisation of businesses, demographic and diversity issues, organisational structures, and the demand of competitive forces (*cf.* Boudreau, Gibson & Ziskin, 2014; Ulrich, 2013; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012; Srivasta, 2012; Morris *et al.*, 2009; Morris, 2006). HR professionals are challenged to acquire relevant competencies that would enable them to influence corporate recognition positively (Stone & Deadrick, 2015).

The findings of the literature review formed the basis of the competency analysis that rendered the synthesis of the essential contemporary HR qualities needed by the world of work (*cf.* Merlevedes, 2014; Timms, 2013; Joshi, 2013; Senyusel, 2009; Ulrich *et al.*, 2009; Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; Becker & Huselid, 2006; Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS), 2015; Ulrich & Huselid, 2013, and various other studies discussed in this chapter). From the literature study, it became clear that an effort should be made to streamline HR curricula to enable graduates to grasp HR competencies, that the world of work needs from HEIs (*cf.* Lee, 2002). The acquisition of relevant HR competencies by HR graduates has become a critical issue (Lee, 2002).

Academia is often accused of living in isolation, and of continuing to provide graduates with knowledge that lacks relevance in the world of work (Collet, Hine & du Plessis, 2015; Kottman & de Weert, 2013; Thacker, 2002). Thus, higher education is challenged to be responsive to the needs of the student population and employers (Van Dijk, 2013). Modifications to the HR curricula that take into account recent developments in the profession and what the curricula do not necessarily reflect, are required (Barnett, 2012).

## **2.5. THE STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE APPROACH**

Strategic human resource management (SHRM) refers to an approach to managing human resources that supports long-term organisational goals and outcomes, within a strategic framework (Nkhwangwa, 2014). This approach focuses on longer-term issues related to people, matches resources to future needs, and addresses macro-concerns about structure, quality, culture, values and commitment in an organisation (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, CIPD, 2015:1). As alluded to earlier, recent literature on HRM indicates that the field of HR has evolved drastically and that the nature and role of HR progressed from the traditional clerical function to that of the more critical strategic business partner – as described earlier (Mello, 2014). These HR developments have led to HR refocusing on strategic issues that involve making the management of people the priority, and also integrating HR policies within the organisational strategy. Mello (2014) argues that strategic HR management is the pillar of an organisation, as all strategic decisions that impact on divisions like marketing, finances, operations and technology-related activities are made by people. Strategic HR management entails the development of best practices and policies that are aligned to achieve an organisation's strategic objectives (Mello, 2014).

Dhār (2008) advanced the perception that strategic HR management (SHRM) is a strategic asset, as it constitutes the critical role of both strategy implementation and management. It ensures that employees understand the extent to which their work contributes to organisational success (Dhār, 2008:n.p.). Global challenges justified

this paradigm shift of HR. As new developments and inventions were discovered, HR had to align itself with the latest powerful changes in the market. This ensured strategic positioning in terms of gaining a more competitive edge, through the value that HR adds. The current strategic HRM clearly exceeds traditional human resource management, in that it regards competencies as the root of organisational capabilities to capitalise on new opportunities. This notion advocates the placement of competent staff in an organisation, to effectively and efficiently manage company culture with the required skills and competences. Given the importance of human resources as an asset, organisations that have a correct understanding of human resource competencies in place, clearly have a good start from which to leverage their human assets for growth.

To achieve strategic goals, the HR profession needs to focus on meeting the needs of the employer community (EC) in mind. This objective might be realised through the introduction of a dynamic model that identifies the HR competencies clearly – and within the context of higher education curricula. This then needs to be followed by embarking on a transformational agenda that guides and supports HR professionals into playing a significant role in advancing the strategic imperatives of organisations. The HR competencies – once identified and defined – will help HR professionals to suggest relevant strategies that could increase the employee commitment to the organisation.

A well-developed HR team will contribute immensely to advancing the opportunity to gain a competitive edge. A well-positioned HR division with professionals that have the requisite qualities and knowledge can build an organisation's capacity, so that it can offer a unique set of services to the market (Armstrong & Schlosser, 2010). HR professionals with relevant competencies, as found in the contemporary HR Competency Models discussed in this chapter, will effectively and successfully contribute to the accomplishment of the vision and mission of an organisation. This can be attained when organisations provide HR management the opportunity to outline how to manage people strategically as business resources.

It has become clear, in recent years, that the main driving force of HR and its management is positioning HR to become advisors to management in terms of

delineating the manner in which people as business resources can help organisations to achieve their goals (Armstrong, 2010). This means that particular HR competencies have become crucial for HR personnel, in order to render them competent to execute strategic tasks in contemporary organisations. Equipping HR personnel with the relevant competencies, underpinned by a suitable qualification, and nurturing the culture and capabilities required for the strategies of a specific organisation, will contribute to achieving organisational goals. This innovative concept of strategic human resource management is still an evolving phenomenon in HRM. Strategic HR management – as Andersen, Cooper and Zhu (2007) claim – puts more emphasis on “a proactive, integrative and value-driven approach to HRM”. This approach entails linking HRM to organisational strategic goals and objectives. The performance of organisations is also perceived to be increased as a result of an investment – in the sense that employees’ contribution to the realisation of strategic objectives, is a key factor (Gilberta, De Winnea & Selsa, 2011). In an organisation, HRM functions would mean involving the HR professional as a strategic partner in the formulation and implementation of the company’s strategies, through HR activities (Pieterse, n.d.).

While HR still has challenges to respond to competently – like the ever-continuing developments and market forces of the 21st Century – there are opportunities that place HR in a better position to contribute meaningfully to strategic imperatives of organisations through acquiring specific competencies (Greer, 2001). This means that human resource professionals now have the opportunity to play a meaningful role in shaping an organisation, both strategically and tactically (Noe *et al.*, 2004). The huge reduction of the workforce due to outsourcing, down-sizing, technology and other forces, calls for HR to be vigilant enough and to emerge as a real strategic partner that meaningfully fosters the advancement of an organisation.

## **2.6. UNIVERSITY TYPES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The emergence of a multiplicity of structures within the HE system in South Africa, came about as the result of an attempt by government to respond to the core demand for societal development in terms of ensuring the economy of the country and the labour market are growing (Latif & Bahroom, 2014; Griesel & Parker, 2009; Badat,

2010). The various types of universities that include universities of technology (UoT), comprehensive universities and traditional universities, constitute the university sector that plays the role of knowledge creation centres. Universities of technology, in particular, specialise and focus on the practical aspects of education. This creates a relevant higher education system for the needs of South Africa. The differences in the focus of the UoT and traditional universities brings into existence a diversity of programmes and curricula. This contributes meaningfully to quality innovation and technology expertise – that provide improved competitiveness.

The lack of practical and technical and vocational education and training by the traditional universities, apparently may be regarded as justification for the existence of the universities of technology and for technical and vocational colleges (Dell, 2014). The higher education system forms part of a seamless system for the transition from school to university – with the ultimately goal of preparing graduates for the job market. This is a critical goal of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). The relevant set of competencies and knowledge that is transferred to the workplace, is a primary goal of universities of technology (UoTs). The rationale for the establishment of the UoT sector was to ensure that graduates acquire the requisite competencies and meet the expectations of the employer community (EC), in terms of technological innovation and development in the country (Link, Siegel & Wright, 2015). The UoTs in particular – by their very nature and reason for existence – are essentially expected to provide graduates with fundamental workplace competencies. The employer community expects graduates that are productive and who can competently display the skills gained from the tertiary institution concerned (Richardson & Kabanoff, 2003:1).

The expectancy of the labour market is critical – especially when it comes to a university of technology (Sumanasiri, Ab Yajid & Khatibi, 2015). It is apparent that the current emphasis on the relevance of curricula is aimed at equipping graduates with relevant and practical competencies. This is particularly applicable in the case of the human resource profession. Since the HR profession is evolving, HE institutions providing training to HR students, need to adapt their curricula constantly. This will

ensure that HEIs produce graduates with most of the contemporary sets of skills and knowledge (Oluwajodu, Blaauw, Greyling & Kleynhans, 2015).

## **2.7. RELEVANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) AND CAREER-ORIENTATED PROGRAMMES**

HEIs play an extremely important role in preparing HR professionals and other professionals for their role in the professional career market, and, as such, the relevance of these institutions and HE in general in South Africa requires attention in this thesis.

### **2.7.1. Preparedness of graduates in higher education (HE)**

*The phenomenon of unemployed graduates, who are without abilities to self-employ and self-determine, after spending three to four years on post-secondary education is an indication to all of us of the challenge in our education at a tertiary level ... The curriculum developers are not paying enough attention to issues of relevance and ensuring that we all pay attention to the skills and competencies learners require when they come out of higher education ... we need a skills revolution in the curriculum of tertiary education (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2006:261, in Mwakikagile, 2010).*

As the statement above suggests, higher education graduates are supposed to be more likely to find employment than people with lower levels of qualifications. Despite this expectation, the European Commission (2013:4-5) emphasises that higher education curricula often turn out to be slow to respond to the changing needs of the wider economy – and therefore fail to help shape the students' future careers. Higher education faces the challenges of modernising education programmes to provide graduates with high-level, employable skills, as well as the transferable skills that equip graduates for a fast-changing labour market (cf. EC, 2013). What is apparent, is that higher education needs to offer programmes and curricula that are relevant to the world of work (Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006).

HEIS, in general, primarily produce two fundamental outputs: knowledge through research, and relevant skills in the form of knowledgeable graduates. This can happen only through designing relevant curricula that address both the labour market-related skills, and research skills (Mason, Williams & Cranmer, and 2006:2). Furthermore, higher education (HE) has a uniquely important role in terms of resolving the persistent skills shortage in South Africa, and that must happen through the production of qualified graduates and postgraduates – and through generating research and innovation (Fischer & Scott, 2011). On the other hand, there is a need for globally equivalent skills, and that raises the debate about curriculum relevance in HE (Dell, 2011; HEFCE, 2010).

A series of studies by the Society for Human Resource Management (SRHM, 2013) served as guidance in shaping the HR curricula of most HR institutions with HR programmes. These developments in the HR curriculum also were based on earlier research done on HR curricula (*cf.* Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006). The studies conducted by SHRM (2013) defined and illustrated parameters that programme designers in universities could use when improving the content of human resource programmes.

An OECD (2012) study found that the fundamental changes in employment over the past years implied a rise in the demand for non-routine cognitive and interpersonal skills – resulting in a decline in the demand for routine knowledge areas like craft skills, physical labour and repetitive physical tasks (OECD, 2012). Graduates are entering a world of employment that is characterised by greater uncertainty, speed, risk, complexity and interdisciplinary working; therefore, contemporary skills sets, knowledge and even attributes for the world of work are required. The real challenge for the HE system is to determine the skills sets and disciplines that are being drawn on by society and the economy (Presidential Discussion Document, 2005). In essence, higher education institutions need to ensure that they impart the highest possible level of knowledge and skills possible – in any skills set and discipline (OECD, 2012). As this requires a very close understanding of the surrounding society and the economy, the university, and particularly its academic staff, have to be deeply embedded in that

society and economy. Graduates of all HE programmes – whether vocational, technical, professional or more general – must be equipped with a relevant skills set and knowledge that address the needs of the labour market (University World News, 2013). Graduates, therefore, need to develop cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness and responsibility, and also a sense of the larger societal challenges within which they will conduct their chosen careers (OECD, 2012). This translates to the HE sector, especially universities at large, coming under increasing pressure to ensure that their graduates are recognised as employable by the world of work. Preparation for employment is still only rarely incorporated in university programmes, and the skills that could make a difference in finding employment and ways to deliver those skills, are still not evident (Sharma, 2013:Online). This has profound implications for curriculum design. This assertion also suggests that economic responsiveness should be integrally related to institutional and cultural responsiveness.

The new curricula need to bridge the gap between the outdated role of the HR profession and the needs of the contemporary organisation. The shift from traditional practices – technical and administrative activities – evidently is crucial if the HR field is preparing to play a more strategic role. This trend is not distinctively the case with the HR field, but it is a norm that cuts across all functions of management – namely in disciplines like the finance function that advanced from accounting, and the marketing function that developed from the sales function (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007). Because people are the driving force behind any successful organisation, the prominence of strategic HR in organisations cannot be overemphasised (Gilani, Zadeh & Saderi, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial that organisations implement well-planned strategic HR ideas that help to coordinate human capital into increased production. Clearly, human capital development has become a key issue in organisations, and it now is imperative that the knowledge, skills and abilities required of HR professionals, be aligned with the expectations of their new role. To be successful in this transition – it is vital that the knowledge, skills and abilities that shape the role of HR professionals are tailored to fit better into knowledge-based industries. HR practitioners in South Africa should be trained to be ranked as a global competitor in the search for talent, as demanded by the changing nature of work (DIUS, 2008). HR programmes thus

must be seen as preparing future HR professionals with competencies demanded by the changing role of HR as a discipline. The inference can be made that HR graduates who are exposed to curricula which are designed to address changing demands, stand a better chance of making a successful career progression in the HR field.

## **2.8. ROLE OF A CURRICULUM**

According to Altbach (2008), universities in our society play a critical role as knowledge-creation entities. They create knowledge, through research, and others play a vital role in the transfer of knowledge to societies through teaching and learning. Through their curricula, universities produce education and training, and also prepare students and graduates intellectually for the world of work (Bollinger, 2003).

The focus now will be on the role of university HR curricula aimed at preparing human resource professionals for the world of work. In this study, the focus was on a university of technology (UoT) offering a programme in human resources. HE, through the relevance of curricula, plays a significant role in preparing students for the world of work (Du Pre, 2009; Robyn, 2013). The curricula need to include the required knowledge and skills related to various professions that form part of the world of work, opportunities to do research, as well as community engagement initiatives that are geared to the development of societies (Republic of South Africa, 2012; Robyn, 2013). This role of HEIs in South Africa is stretched further to be the power source driving development around societal, cultural and economic areas (Castells, 2009; Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006; Cloete & Maassen, 2015). Universities are viewed as institutions producing graduates with requisite and relevant competencies that will enhance the knowledge-based economy for the benefit of societies (Sucio *et al.*, 2011). In the recent past, it has become clear that the role of universities, primarily, has become a public duty to collaborate closely with industry to offer newly discovered research-based ideas needed in the world of work (Ponds *et al.*, 2010). The evolving trends and innovations in the global space need to be considered when curricula are reviewed. This must conform to the set of relevant competencies and attributes that are needed by the job market. The competencies and attributes referred to here must be founded on scientific research (Waas *et al.*, 2010; Hautala, 2011).

## **2.9. RESPONSIVENESS OF THE HR PROGRAMMES**

Ekong and Cloete (1997:10-11) assert that the role of the curriculum, in terms of identity formation and citizenship, is of major importance – and is the central determinant of curriculum responsiveness. This assertion refers to an organisation's workforce, its knowledge, skills and training that are expected to provide the competitive edge for contemporary organisations. Thus, the training, development and nurturing of HR talent are imperative in ensuring that organisations will succeed in the fierce global space of competition. The role of HR professionals has changed in recent times, The Personnel Department (TPD, 2015: n.p). This means that newly appointed HR graduates in the HR field have a different job profile compared to those who did the same job a decade ago (TPD, 2015:n.p). The change resulted from factors like the focus on strategic issues which were not part of HR in the past (Sharma, 2012), changes in operations in organisations, and the pressure associated with new technologies (Vosburgh, 2007). The training of HR graduates also needs to be aligned with these developments, as these developments impact directly on the way in which organisations function. According to Ullah (2012), the roles of HR professionals changed drastically due to the new focus of organisations that need to respond to a competitive environment, varying needs of the labour market, and the globalisation of businesses.

According to Harrison (2002), in order to add value, HRM must be able to help the organisation to achieve the strategic goal and significantly position it to differentiate itself from competitors. This assertion clearly indicates that HRM has evolved in terms of preparing for the competitive world of work, and acquiring the necessary expertise. Thus, to summarise, the past two decades have witnessed tremendous developments in the field of research on HRM practices (Bal, 2011). Bal (2011:2) asserts: "Since the formal HRM function and department were initiated in the 1920s, there have been considerable changes in both theory and practice of HRM." The field of HRM therefore has developed in terms of researching these changes, and has evolved in terms of responding to the ever-changing developments in the 21st Century (Sparrow & Brewster, 2010). The field of HRM constantly revised its activities and role in order to have an impact on and enhance the experience of multiple stakeholders in organisations (Sparrow & Brewster, 2010).

As indicated above, in order for HR to be able to respond to the competitive work environment, it must fulfil an increasingly strategic role in the success of an organisation. This calls for a well-equipped HR professional that must serve the role of a partner at both the operational and strategic levels in an organisation. UoTs should provide more extensive learning opportunities, and, through frequently restructured curricula, address what students need to render them more skilled, more competent, and more employable. These institutions should be more employer-centred, provide constant upgrading through short courses, should take the institution into the workplace, and liaise with employers regularly to ensure that prospective employees receive a relevant education (du Pre, 2009).

## **2.10. HR AND THE WORK ENVIRONMENT**

In today's changing environment, it is relevant to determine the precise role of HR and how it is managed. HR was seen as only playing the operational role, such as being a policy-pusher – with the main emphasis on record-keeping and the administration of benefits of employees (Ulrich, 1997a). Contrary to this assertion, HR now is considered as a significant business partner and plays a vital and strategic role in helping organisations achieve their goals (Hyde, 2004). This role ensures that employees in the organisation have a general direction in which they are working. The role of HR is also to streamline activities within the organisation – thus ensuring that work is executed in a planned, organised and coherent way (Hyde, 2004).

Recent times have seen a fast-moving global environment that has shown that the management of human resources and the effective implementation of HR strategies that support organisational strategic goals, have become more important to competitive success than ever (Rakesh Yadav, 2014). The innovative planning of HR can clearly give an organisation an outstanding competitive edge (Rakesh Yadav, 2014). The rapid change in socio-economic, political and environmental situations in the world, has brought tremendous pressures – to which HR must respond. Therefore, the role of HRM and its practices are also compelled to change and to suit the current circumstances.

Shaban and Singh (2011) illustrate that HRM has a crucial role to play in today's business – besides several challenges that have a bearing on the existence and

justification of HR at the workplace. The challenges of HR have been characterised as intense and include competition, technologically inclined innovations, ever-changing consumer demands, and aggressive competitive rivalry (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). These challenges emanate from concepts such as globalisation, embracing latest technology, management of talent or human capital, and responsiveness to the market.

## **2.11. THE CONCEPT OF COMPETENCY MODELS**

HR literature describes the concept of competency in various ways – depending on the context on which the author focuses. According to Velde (2009), there are various definitions of the concept. These definitions sometimes lead to confusion around what is exactly meant by competency and competency concepts. In this study, the general thrust of the meaning of competency, as espoused in Velde's (2009:n.p.) study, will be used. This concept is understood as:

*the capability to use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required in the execution of critical work functions in a defined work setting environment.*

In discussion of the competency models, cognisance was also taken of the definition by Noonan (2012):

*A competency model is a framework for organizing a collection of observable skills, behaviours and attitudes that impact the quality of work that people do. It describes what people need to know and be able to do in order to execute their responsibilities effectively.*

Noonan (2012) added that:

*Even though the definition is pretty simple, the role of competency models in organisational design has become extremely significant. In fact, as the war for talent continues to rage, many organisations have come to view competencies as foundational to effective talent management and have classified competency models as a strategic imperative. The reason for this is that the best organisations are using competencies to:*

- *Recruit and select employees to ensure organisational fit,*
- *Set performance expectations and measure contributions objectively,*
- *Focus employees on what is critical to enhancing their contribution and increasing their satisfaction, and*
- *Provide a roadmap for employee development and career planning.*

The elucidation provided above clearly points out the importance of the ability to execute the HR-related tasks mentioned by Noonan (2012). Thus, competency in HR could be defined as clear and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that lead to enhanced employee performance and broader organisation attainment of goals (Walters, 2006). In addition, the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD, 2015) – a professional association for human resource management professionals – defines competency as “a behaviour that lies behind competent performance”. Brown (2011) states that “competencies are the effective application of skills”. These definitions apparently indicate that the term broadly refers to a set or cluster of predetermined qualities. These abilities and personal attributes are critical in the execution of special tasks. The competency approach to human resource management dates back to the early period when the move from personnel management took place (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006, in Ashkezari & Aeen, 2012).

Even though there is an apparent lack of generally accepted definitions of the term competency, the generally acknowledged definition of Garvaan and McGuire (2001) and of Velde (2009) will be used in this study. This concept is seen as conceptualising the relation between education and the world of work (Griesel & Parker, 2009). Competence would therefore be referred to as the ability to perform a task up to a certain accepted standard (Garvaan & McGuire 2001). This indeed makes it apparent that competency is related to the world of work. Lawler (2004, 2005), defines HR competencies as the capabilities, value and knowledge that HR professionals must have acquired to successfully execute organisational competencies. The well-researched competencies depicted in various models discussed below, aim at engaging employees to serve customers and to create concrete shareholder wealth.

HR competencies would primarily define the skills set expected of those who work in HR – and this forms the basis for improvement in the quality of functioning of HR professionals.

Several studies on the changing competencies of HR professionals have been conducted over the past two decades (Lawson, 1990; McLagan, 1989). The primary purpose of these studies was to determine the qualities and abilities that prevailed and enabled HR professionals to master their work and to enhance the performance of organisations in the competitive world of work. This study primarily focused on the identification of relevant HR competencies and skill sets, knowledge and attributes that the world of work expects from the HR graduates, and, in addition, attempts to investigate the new HR qualities that could be recommended for inclusion in HE institutions' HR curricula and programmes.

As HR became a key factor in ensuring attainment of organisational goals, it has become imperative that HR professionals – by virtue of their knowledge and understanding of the importance of the organisational strategy – be in possession of distinct strategic leadership as a competency that should be displayed by HR professionals. This will help the HR profession gain and maintain the respect it deserves within an organisation. HR therefore is challenged to respond to ever-changing business operations, by showing in-depth understanding of the organisation's strategic direction or business. Given the evolution brought on by research and current scientific developments, it is natural that HR professionals who were successful a decade or two ago, will not necessarily be effective in the present era. It therefore is imperative that HR scholars and professionals become knowledgeable about the current HR competencies – that are so pertinent in increasing the performance of organisations (Aitchison, 2007; Ahmad *et al.*, 2014).

In pursuit of rethinking new approaches to HR, organisations moved towards placing more emphasis on requiring work-related competency-based systems (Potgieter, 2002; Frageli & Shimizu, 2012). The literature indicates that the main challenge for the

HR profession seems to be the slow pace in satisfying the competency needs of the world of work. This is evidenced by literature that indicates the HR competencies needed by the job market (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; Aitchison, 2007). HR competencies required in current-day organisations, as indicated by the discussions of various HR competency models, indicate that the HR profession has to ensure professionals acquire the necessary set of relevant HR competencies and attributes. Hence, Selmer and Chiu (2004) and Long and Ismail (2008) averred that HR competencies must show work-related attributes that individuals can draw upon to work excellently. Ulrich and Brockbank (2004) suggest that HR competencies must expose the following attributes: relevant knowledge and skills and values that contribute to the organisation's sustainability. Currently, organisations need HR to focus on their strategic direction – rather than just fulfil the traditional administrative role (Gilani, Zadeh & Saderi, 2012). What is required by modern organisations is the incorporation of human capital and processes through the application of organisational resources such as employees' skills, culture, motivational and social initiatives (Babalola & Marques, 2013).

The HR profession needs to meet the needs of the employer community (EC). This objective will only be realised through the introduction of dynamic curricula that identify currently required HR competencies which meet the employer community's demands. The HR profession needs to operate within the best interest of organisations, and add value (Ulrich, 1998). In modern times of fierce competition in the market place, excellence through proactive learning, quality offerings, and re-engineering are fundamental in getting organisations to win a competitive edge (Ramlall, 2006). Required competency levels – once they are determined and well-defined – will form the basis of a responsive model that fits the desire of organisations (Ramlall, 2006).

Strategic competencies seem to be a requirement that could enhance performance (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2004), and, for this purpose, a redefined HR model curriculum is a prerequisite (Ramlall, 2006). Ramlall (2006) indicates that HR researchers have an obligation to close the gap that apparently exists between the prospective and desired – that is, what HR practitioners can contribute and the actual performance of practitioners and professionals in the field of HR. Vosburgh (2008) further maintains

that the adaptation of HR programmes is significant in terms of the ongoing development of HR professionals. This is perceived as having a direct impact on the improved performance of organisations (Ramlall, 2006).

## **2.12. Conclusion**

A fundamental aspect of any HR function is to integrate the overall business strategy with the sole aim of maximising performance of the organisation. This chapter attempted to provide background on the HR literature and how HR has evolved over time in terms of the changing competencies that the world of work perceived as being critical for enhanced performance. What surfaced prominently is that personnel and professionals need to be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, competencies and attributes – to achieve organisational strategic objectives and vision. This is seen as fundamental in achieving organisational goals. HR competencies play a critical role in helping HR professionals to contribute significantly to the organisation. The consequential evolution of HR competencies over the years has led to the adaptation of various domains of competencies – that directly have an impact on the significance and role of the contemporary HR function in organisations.

In the following section, the various consulted HR competency models will be discussed in depth. These competency models were found to be helpful in helping the study keep track of and follow the trends of new developments in the evolution of HR competencies.

## *Chapter Three*

### *The Concept of HR Competency Models*

#### **3.1. THE EVOLUTION OF HR COMPETENCY MODELS**

The literature overwhelmingly indicates that profound developments have taken place in terms of HR Competency Models which have evolved in recent times (Rakesh Yadav, 2014; SHRM, 2012; Abdullah & Sentosa, 2012; Abdul, 2014). The global shift in the complex operations of organisations compelled the HR profession to review its mandate and to acquire competencies that will have an impact on the strategic goals of organisations (Lee & Yu, 2013). Lee and Yu (2013) purport that:

*Profound shifts in the global marketplace are ushering in a new era of complexity, uncertainty and change of companies. The rise of the internet and related technology has accelerated these market shifts, opening business strategies, models and processes along the way.*

Yadav (2014:1) and Lee and Yu (2013) further assert that forces that demand changes in the manner in which HR operates, include, amongst others, improved technology, changing customer needs, socio-economic pressures and competition amongst organisations – as well as political and environmental situations around the world.

The HR Competency Models became a key mechanism through which HR could respond to the changing environments in the world of work (Abdulla, 2014; Abdullah & Sentosa, 2012). The introduction of the Models became a prerequisite in terms of responding to the ever-changing demands of the job market and the world of work. The emphasis of the discussion on HR Competency Models in the sections below, will hinge on the extensive work of various authors on HR Competency Models over the past two decades, who have identified HR competencies required by the world of work.

In an attempt to identify relevant HR competencies for the world of work, and also to get a sense of the background of the evolution of HR competencies, the study investigated the following HR Competency Models:

##### **3.1.1. National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA).**

- 3.1.2. International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) HR Competency Model.
- 3.1.3. The Office of the Personnel Management (OPM) at the Resources and Development Centre (USA Government).
- 3.1.4. The Multiple-Roles Model for HR Management (Ulrich, 1997).
- 3.1.5. Brockbank and Ulrich's HR Competency Model (2004).
- 3.1.6. The Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) Competency Model of Brockbank, Ulrich, Younger and Ulrich (2012).
- 3.1.7. The South African developed model introduced in 2012 by the South African HR Competency Model (SABPP, 2012).

An overview of each HR Competency Model will be provided in the next section. In addition to the investigation of the literature on HR Competency Models depicted above – the study also had a scrutinised other HR Competency models such as the SHRM HR Competency Model (2012) and the Cornell ILR HR Competency Model – as these entailed core HR qualities that HEIs need to consider when new curricula and programmes are reviewed or even developed from scratch. As a result, HR competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes from the latter two Models, are also integral for HR professionals.

The literature in the foregoing section indicates that the labour market expects HR graduates to display work-integrated skills and abilities in the workplace (cf. McDaniel et al., 1998). The implication is that organisations need to undertake a transition process of abandoning the out-of-date way of conducting business which focuses on operational matters – instead of playing a strategic role. The focus should be on facilitating organisations to achieve strategic goals. According to Yadav (2014), for HR professionals to get recognition, they need to have the strategy in place that will exploit the organisation's human resources – with the ultimate goal of gaining a competitive edge. This implies a holistic approach of addressing broader aspects that would contribute to the business's reputation in the competitive market (Martin-Acazar, Romero-Fernandez & Sanchez-Gardey, 2012). In McDaniel *et al.* (1998), it is emphasised that the world of work requires HR to contribute to organisational

performance and to help with achieving organisations' strategic goals (Dickmann, Sparrow & Brewster, 2008).

Furthermore, the literature on HR competencies, skills sets and knowledge – as suggested by Brewster, Farndale, Van Ommeren (2000), Marthis and Jackson (2009), Compton (2009), and Chase (2010) – indicates there is a new set of competencies that comprises HR competencies, skills sets and knowledge required for HR to keep up with the evolving manner in which organisations operate. The latter literature cited core HR competencies, skills and knowledge as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, business acumen, credibility, professionalism, leadership, relationship management and adaptability. The above sources also declared that there is a steady move by organisations from focusing only on traditional HR responsibilities like HR planning and staffing; performance management and development; employee and labour relations; compensation and benefits; health, safety, welfare and security; systems information and management; and organisational design (Waldrop, 2008; Walsh & Bach, 2013).

To confirm the sentiments above, the Human Resources Professionals Association (2014:5) also asserts that one major challenge in developing HR competency – is the varying roles HR professionals must play to master their work. Various HR Competency Models suggest closely linked competencies that the world of work perceives as being fundamental in the execution of HR professionals' work (HRPA, 2014). The dissimilarities observed in HR competencies in various models, are mainly due to geographical location and varying organisational cultures (HRPA, 2014). Each country or continent will adopt a model that addresses its needs best and which is best suited to respond to the strategic direction of its professionals. The HR Competency Models indicated above are applied in the global environment, and, as a result, a succinct account of each model will be provided.

## 3.2. SUCCINCT PRESENTATION OF HR COMPETENCY MODELS

### 3.2.1. The National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA)

NAPA is regarded as a pioneer HR Model that identified requisite HR competencies required in the workplace (Simons, 2011). The Federal Government (USA) regards NAPA as an agency with a solid interest in the development of relevant and updated models for HR professionals. According to Simons (2011), the HR profession has positioned itself to develop and implement the new HR competencies in order to deal effectively with the new realities that the HR field faces – the changing environment, competition in the labour market, and new developments such as high technology that enhances quality delivery of work and better organisational performance. Simons (2011) maintained that the acquirement of the new set of competencies certainly would put HR in an advantaged position for it to be considered when strategic decisions are made, since this would determine the magnitude and impact of HR on the organisation. HR will also earn respect and recognition if professionals are equipped with the necessary and relevant set of skills and competencies that enhance the general performance of the organisation (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012).

Table 3.1 (below) represents the competencies, according to NAPA, that capable HR practitioners require if they are to play a significant role in a contemporary organisation.

**Table 3.1: National Academy of Public administration’s (NAPA) Competency Model**

<b>HR Roles</b>	<b>Competencies</b>
<b>Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mission orientated</li> <li>- Strategic planner</li> <li>- Systems innovator</li> <li>- Understands team behaviour</li> </ul>
<b>Leader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Takes risks</li> <li>- Ethical</li> <li>- Decisive</li> <li>- Develops staff</li> <li>- Creates trust</li> </ul>
<b>HR expert</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knows HR principles</li> <li>- Customer orientated</li> <li>- Applies business procedures</li> <li>- Manages resources</li> <li>- Uses HR tools</li> </ul>
<b>Advocate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values diversity</li> <li>- Resolves conflict</li> <li>- Communicates well</li> </ul>

	- Respects others
<b>Change agent</b>	- Manages change - Consults - Analyses - Uses coalition skills - Influences others

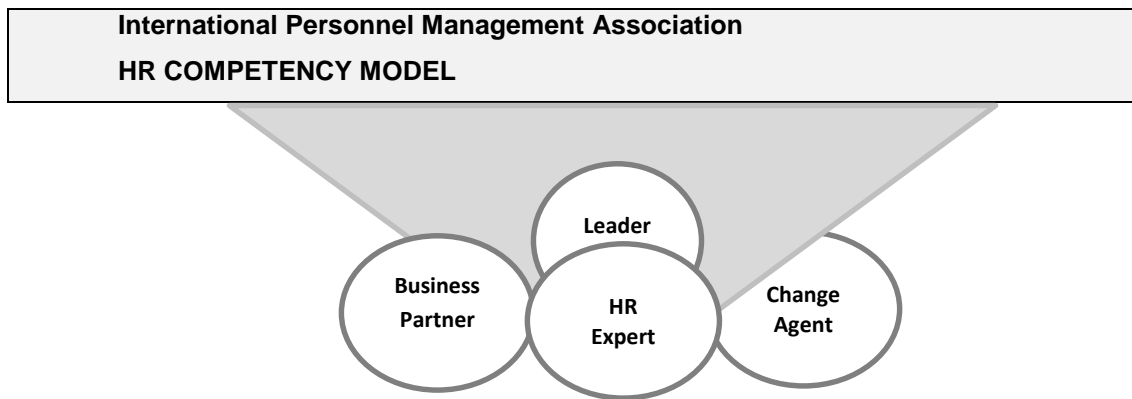
Source: National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Competency Model (1996).

The National Academy of Public Administration (1996) in Washington, developed a competency framework involving five key HR roles and role definitions (competencies) – as illustrated in Table 3.1. These are seen as supporting areas such as the organisational strategy, conflict resolution and organisational change. Organisations, through HEIs, are encouraged to invest in training their own HRM professionals to master the HR competencies illustrated in the model. This is to capacitate them to be able to operate at the level that will make a meaningful contribution to both operational efficiency and strategic decision-making.

### **3.2.2. The International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) HR Competency Model**

The IPMA-HR came into existence way back in the 1990s – as a result of various companies in China wanting to train HR management (Zhang, 2012; Ho, Lo & Teo, 2013). This development marked the dawn of new management competency training (Zhang, 2012; Ho, Lo & Teo, 2013). However, Grossman (2007) observed that even though the HR field has evolved over time and new developments in terms of the required competencies are discovered, HR is still at an early stage of development in countries like China. This competency model was based on the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) model, discussed in the previous section. The IPMA illustrates the interrelationship between the four main roles of the model (Simons, 2011). According to Simons (2011), the combination of interrelated competencies in the NAPA, IPMA and OPM models, leads to superior performance at both individual and organisational level. The clear demonstration and implementation of the HR competencies illustrated in these HR models is geared to attracting executive attention and willingness to bring HR on board – and would have proven its worth beyond a reasonable doubt.

The illustrative IMPA-HR Competency Model is presented in Figure 3.1 (below).



**Figure 3.1: International Personnel Management Association (IPMA) HR Competency Model**

*Source:* Sun and Kan (2008); Dai and Liang (2012). IPMA Model provided by Parsons (n.d.) (SPHR).

The IPMA-HR competency model indicates that models have a significant role to play in ensuring the enhancement of HR development in organisations. Its competencies are assigned to four major HR roles or domains: HR expert, business partner, change agent, and leader. The competencies included in the model are similar to those of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) model. While recognising the undisputable importance of the HR expert role, the IPMA Model envisions a new HR professional who partners with line managers to proactively devise effective solutions to organisational problems, and who leads and manages change – and also serves as a role model to promote leadership, ethics and integrity. The IPMA Competency Model indicates the interrelationship of the four roles. The roles are identified within the context of the work that needs to be accomplished in an organisational environment.

In Table 3.2 (below), the main HR competencies of the IPMA Model are presented. Sub-factors that underpin HR competencies are also provided. In essence, the sub-factors displayed within the IPMA Model illustrate what needs to be executed under every HR competency.

**Table 3.2: IPMA model with sub-factors of HR competencies displayed**

HR Competency roles/domains	Sub-factors of HR competencies
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change</li> <li>- Advocacy</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leadership abilities</li> <li>- Vision</li> </ul>
<b>Core</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business knowledge</li> <li>- Communication</li> <li>- Negotiation</li> </ul>
<b>Consultation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influence skills</li> <li>- Change management</li> <li>- Management skills</li> </ul>
<b>HR Expertise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Best practices</li> <li>- Applies technology</li> <li>- HR tools</li> <li>- Design</li> </ul>

Source: Sun and Kan (2008).

### 3.2.3. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) HR Competency Model

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Personnel, Resources and Development Centre (USA, 2006), based in the USA, and which provides HR services for the federal government – is regarded as the world’s biggest HR department (Pynes, 2004; Liebowitz, 2012:96; Robert & Hendon, 2015). This indicates how crucial the quest for new and improved HR competencies in the workplace is. The introduction of interrelated competencies in the OPM model is proof that the labour market places a premium value on the importance of competencies that HR professionals need to display at workplace. There is an element of similarity in HR competencies that the world of work needs in all the HR competency models studied. But, what is of importance, is that research on HR competencies has clearly pointed to the need for quality and competent HR professionals in organisations.

The OPM model’s HR competency domains and sub-factor competencies are tabulated in Table 3.3 (below):

**Table 3.3: The OPM Personnel, Resources and Development Centre HR Competency Model**

<b>Competency Domains</b>	<b>Sub-factor Competencies</b>
<b>Strategic Partner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organisational awareness</li> <li>- Problem solving</li> <li>- Customer service</li> <li>- Stress tolerance</li> <li>- Oral communication</li> </ul>
<b>Leader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision making</li> <li>- Planning and evaluation</li> <li>- Conflict management</li> <li>- Self-management</li> <li>- Self-esteem</li> <li>- Oral communication</li> </ul>
<b>Employee Champion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility</li> <li>- Teaching others</li> <li>- Learning</li> <li>- Interpersonal skills</li> <li>- Oral communication</li> </ul>
<b>Technical Expert</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Technical competence</li> <li>- Legal, government and jurisprudence</li> <li>- Personnel and human resources</li> <li>- Information management</li> <li>- Arithmetic</li> <li>- Mathematical reasoning</li> <li>- Customer services</li> <li>- Writing</li> <li>- Reading</li> <li>- Memory</li> <li>- Attention to detail</li> <li>- Oral communication</li> </ul>
<b>Change consultant</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teamwork</li> <li>- Reasoning</li> <li>- Influencing/negotiating</li> <li>- Integrity/honesty</li> <li>- Creative thinking</li> <li>- Oral communication</li> <li>- Stress tolerance</li> </ul>

Sources: Pynes (2004); Liebowitz (2012:96); Robert and Hendon (2015).

### **3.2.4. Multiple-Roles Model for HR Management (Ulrich, 1997)**

Ulrich's (1997a) conceptual framework entails a two-fold element. According to Ulrich (1997a), two sets of HR competencies exist and they focus on strategic and daily operations in organisations. The Strategic Partner and Change Agent HR

competencies represent the strategic goal – while also focusing on the alignment of strategies with the overall organisational strategy. According to Ulrich (1997), HR professionals in the first place have to be seen as being a *strategic business partner* by contributing to the attainment of business strategies. HR professionals can convert business strategies into workable policies and business practices, as a way to respond to the customer demands – and a financial implication could be reduced as HR would be playing a more effective role in the execution of strategy.

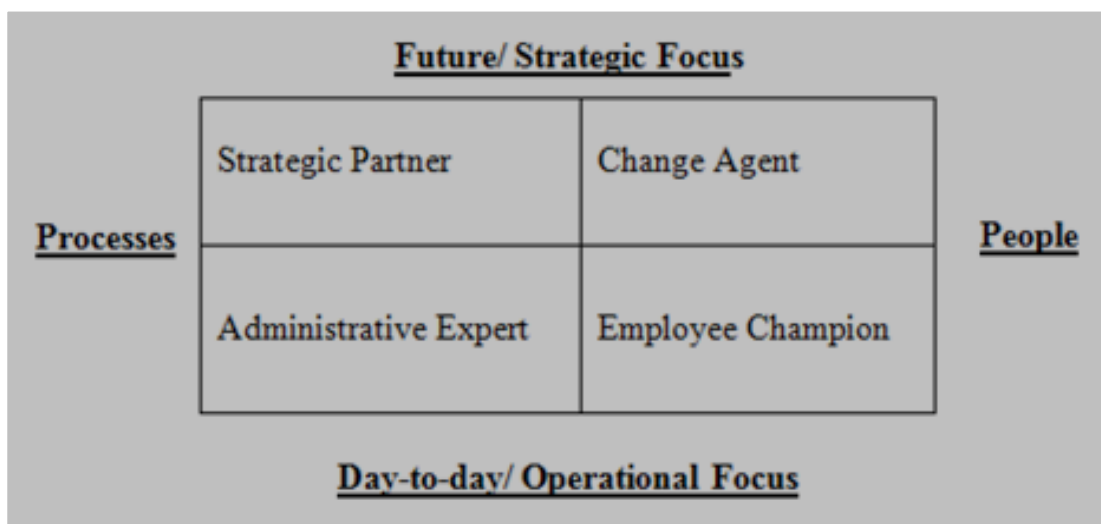
The other significant role of HR professionals in organisations is that of a *change agent*. This role encompasses the responsibility to add value through the management of transformation and change. This entails cultural change within the organisation. The ultimate aim of this fundamental role is to ensure that change in an organisation plays a critical role through the improvement of the business design and implementation of strategic initiatives, and that it contributes meaningfully to strategies that include turnaround-time management in all organisational dealings. The processes for change are the sole responsibility of the HR professionals, and they are expected to identify and ensure implementation of strategies in this area.

The HR practitioner as an *administrative expert* is tasked with the duty to create an effective organisational infrastructure that allows the organisation to function efficiently. This is achieved through the role that HR professionals should play in fundamental actions like organisational design, implementing adequate processes that lead to quality staffing, human capital development, performance management, and managing employee relations and employee assistance programmes. HR professionals are tasked to ensure that these processes are designed and delivered efficiently – without malfunction of any kind. Over and above these roles, HR professionals as *employee champions* have to contribute to the organisation's welfare by getting involved in the day-to-day challenges of the employees – and attending to their needs in terms of listening to their concerns and providing appropriate advice when necessary in areas like labour disputes, development and growth opportunities, and the general welfare of employees. HR professionals should be able to link employee satisfaction to increased performance – to the benefit of the organisation.

In order to achieve all these fundamental expectations, HR professionals – as a starting point (according to the model) – should forge sturdy partnerships with the

management of the organisation and help with successful strategic implementation. The next aspect to focus on would be for HR practitioners to ensure that the expertise that contributes to the efficient and effective performance of employees, is maintained. This would ensure decreased negative financial implications for the organisation – while the real sustenance of quality is maintained. HR practitioners also must understand and communicate the discontent of workers to management. In this process, HR will have to engage workers by means of their representation in structures, such as trade unions.

The four key roles mentioned above are indicated in Figure 3.2 (below). The blocks in the HR model depicted below indicate the role of each competency.



**Figure 3.2: Multiple-Roles Model for HR management**

Source: Ulrich (1997).

Table 3.4 (below) illustrates the main domains of HR competency – as matched with the related role definition of each HR competency.

**Table 3.4: The role definition of HR competency domains (Ulrich, 1997)**

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Role definition</b>
Strategic partner	Aligning strategies and business goals: 'organisational diagnosis'
Administrative expert	Re-engineering organisational processes: 'shared services'
Employee champion	Listening and responding to employees: 'providing resources to employees'
Change agent	Managing transformation and change: 'ensuring capacity for change'

The development of the HR competency model depicted above brought about fundamental change in the practice of HR. This transformation signified a crucial development in terms of the realignment of attitude towards a much more strategic, action-orientated position, significant structure, and behavioural change in the field of HR. The development of a functional vision and strategies, as well as the definition of critical structures as underpinned by HR competencies, certainly signified key success factors for excellence in all the functions of HR. According to Schoonover (2003), the HR competencies should add value and generate noteworthy satisfaction regarding the needs of the client. The development of HR competencies puts the focus on the key needs of the client.

### **3.2.5. Brockbank and Ulrich's HR Competence Model (2004)**

The four basic HR competencies mentioned in the study of Ulrich (1997), and further referred to in Ulrich's Human Resource Competency Study (2007), raised the skills levels for HR professionals. Boselie and Paauwe (2004) make it clear that there is a compelling case for HR to revise and present a set of domains of HR competencies – in order to respond better to the demands of the world of work. The last round of a data-collection on HR, published in 2012, underpinned the findings of Boselie and Paauwe (2004) on the requisite HR competencies required of HR professionals.

Brockbank and Ulrich (2004) found that HR competencies contributed to the improvement of performance in organisations, and revealed five domains of HR competencies:

- Strategic contribution
- Personal credibility
- HR delivery
- Business knowledge
- HR technology.

Brockbank and Ulrich (2004) assert that the set of competencies in the HR model below (Table 2.5) represents the role that HR professional are expected to play, in order to address the needs of the labour market, within the realm of the contemporary organisation’s strategic thrust.

**Table 3.5: Brockbank & Ulrich’s HR Competency Model (2004)**

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Competency areas</b>
Personal credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Achieving results</li> <li>- Effective relationships</li> <li>- Personal communications</li> </ul>
Strategic contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture management</li> <li>- Fast change</li> <li>- Strategic decision-making</li> <li>- Market-driven connectivity</li> </ul>
HR delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Staffing</li> <li>- Development</li> <li>- Organisational structure</li> <li>- Performance management</li> </ul>
Business knowledge and HR technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Role of the two domains mentioned above is interactive and underpins the activities of the other three domains</li> </ul>

*Source:* Boselie and Paauwe (2004).

Paauwe (2004) avers that there is a regular overlap in HR competencies. For instance, the strategic role provides support for the functioning of the other HR domains. The HR competencies in the table above work interdependently. The effectiveness of the

model in an organisation depends on the correct implementation of the displayed HR competencies.

This study, as it focuses on the evolution of HR competencies that are geared to addressing the needs of the labour market, gathered rapid change since the late 1980s (Abdullah, 2014). The current data set released at the beginning of 2012, will be discussed in the section below.

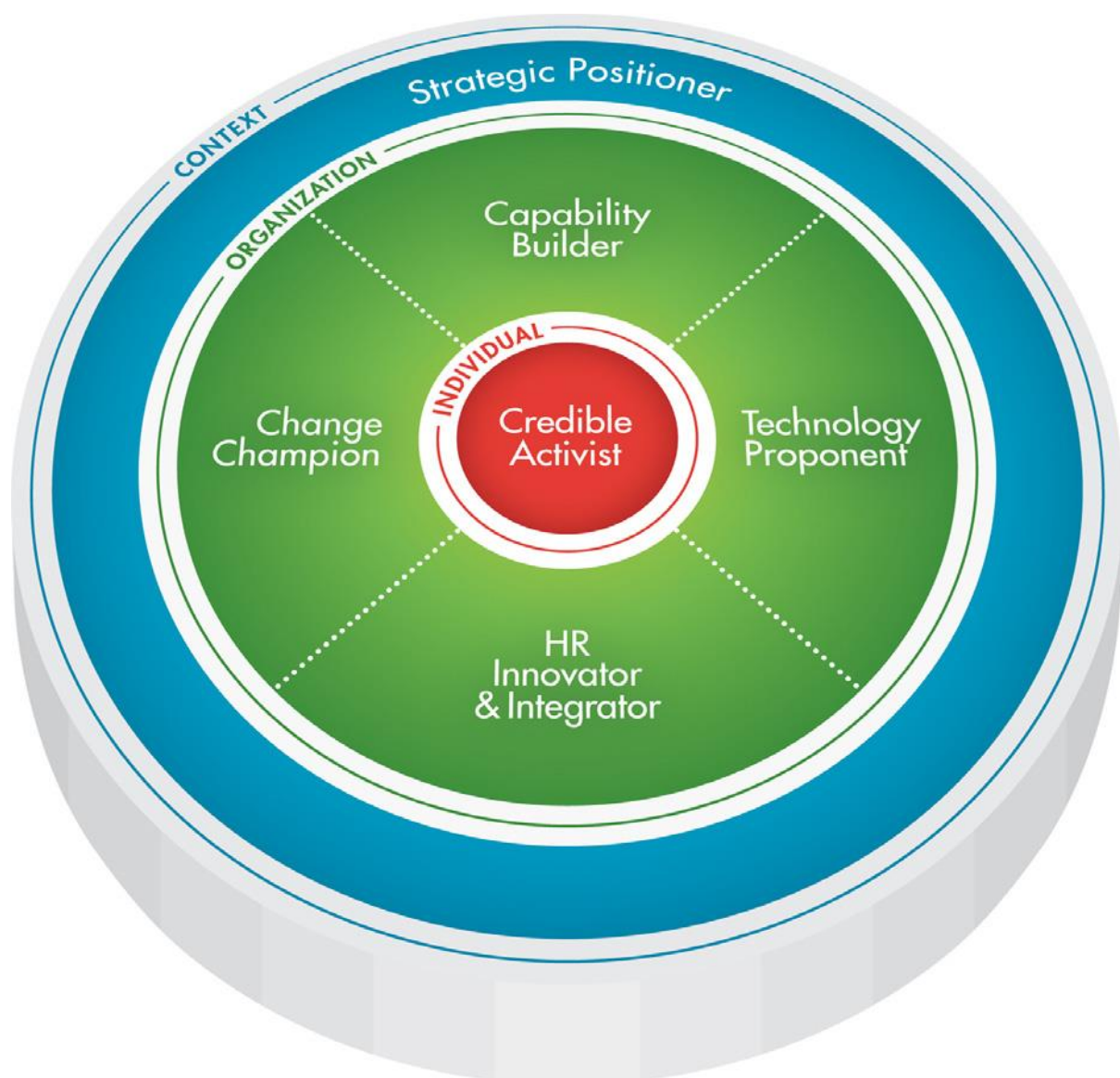
### **3.2.6. The HRCS Competency Model (2012)**

In pursuit of the latest research on the development of HR Competency Models and the role of HR in contemporary organisations, the assertion by Ulrich *et al.* (2012) and the HRCS (Human Resource Competency Study) – rendered significant results that identified the most sought-after HR competencies in organisations. The extensive studies proved to be a great leap forward in terms of requisite and relevant HR competencies, and covered most parts of the world. The studies successfully uncovered relevant qualities that the modern labour market needs in HR. The transactional purview of HR in the organisational system has been converted to the contemporary strategic role. The literature on HR clearly indicates the significance of a focus on the strategic role of HR in executing its evolving assignment – as expected by organisations (Nankervis *et al.*, 1999; Flamholtz, 2005; Phillips, 2005; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Boudreau & Ramstead, 2007; Compton, 2009). It must also be indicated that the research by Ulrich and the HRCS made significant strides in the field of HR in terms of gathering global views regarding the needs of HR professionals, as indicated by contemporary organisations. Based on the literature cited in this study, it became clear that the latest trend indicated that the HR profession is to pay more attention to competencies that would help HR professionals to add value to the broader organisational vision, mission and strategy.

According to Ulrich *et al.* (2009a), the complex nature of organisations' operations and global pressures, compel HR professionals to change in order to conform to the

changing demands. These changes necessarily include the redesign of the HR curriculum in relation to business requirements. The assertion is a direct challenge to the universities to review their curriculum content to ensure that it positively responds to the needs of the market. Hence the emphasis on the examination of the requisite HR competencies – as required by the world of work.

Figure 3.3 (below) depicts the latest HR competencies required for contemporary organisations - as contained in the HR Competency Model:



**Figure 3.3: 2012 HR Competency Model (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; the RBL Group, 2012).**

The HR model depicted above, and the domains within it as shown, convey an apparent translation of activities that enhance HR agility in an organisation – and especially at the workplace. In this HR model the focus is on the level of influence in an organisation. Ulrich and Brockbank (2007) maintained that HR professionals should become proficient at competencies that involve people and business-related matters. This is indicative of the prerequisite that HR professionals need to be empowered with skills and knowledge that enhance their capability to attend pertinently to the human capital in the organisation, through effective communication and empathy. The organisations' environments require HR professionals to be able to adjust and to ensure that the hopes and demands of customers and investors are properly addressed. Research findings released in 2012 introduced the HR Competency Model of Ulrich – which precisely defined the HR qualities expected of an HR professional (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). Ulrich and partners' survey and analysis put organisations at an advantage. This seems to be a primary factor – since HR efficacy and contributions gradually will turn the focus of the organisation in a positive direction (Mondare, Douthitt & Carson, 2011; Lee & Heppner, 2015).

There is no doubt that HR professionals need to have insight into the organisation in order to provide skilful advice on people management matters that impact on the organisation. In the world of work that evolves so rapidly, HR professionals must stay abreast of the trends that impact on their contribution to the development of the organisation – and how best they could assist with their expertise, skills and knowledge, to take the business to the next level in order to gain a competitive edge over competitors (Ulrich, 2013; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

In a study on the most contemporary HR competencies around the globe, six key HR competencies were identified (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). The findings indicated that for HR professionals to be responsive to the requirements of modern organisations, they needed to be competent in all six areas identified. This would ensure maximum service delivery and improved performance in the organisation. The HR Competency Model

designed by Ulrich *et al.* (2012) came about as a response to numerous persuasive issues that face business globally. These are depicted as:

- 1) *HR is expected to turn outside business trends and stakeholder expectations into internal actions.*
- 2) *The business and its people* (HR should focus on the development of the people).
- 3) *Individual and organisational competency* (HR is assessed in terms of the performance of individual professionals and the entire organisation).
- 4) *Futuristic focus* (HR needs to redesign and meet the future needs of the organisation).
- 5) *Strategic role* (HR needs to reposition in order to contribute to the general strategic thrust of the organisation).

The study cited above focused on the six contemporary key HR competencies proclaimed in the report of Ulrich *et al.* (2012). These HR competencies were found to be useful, as the report avers that HR professionals will be positioned to tackle more strategic roles and further enhance the efficacy of a company's performance (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012).

A succinct account of the HR Competency Model compiled with the help of a survey by HRCS (2012) on HR professionals – warrants discussion:

- i. **Strategic positioner** – This competency domain illustrates the quality traits of a professional who understands changing professional circumstances. The report refers to “*stakeholder expectations and business requirements*”. The strategic positioner can turn opportunities into talent, but also embraces the organisational culture and takes leadership actions. According to HRCS (2012), the strategic positioner is a person that “*understands the general business conditions such as social, technological, economic, political, environmental, and demographic trends that affect their industry and geography*”.
- ii. **Credible activist** – The Oxford Dictionary defines credibility as “*the quality of being trusted and believed in*”. An inference made from the definition is that credible competency illustrates an HR professional with outstanding personal skills, who enhances the trust of employees and who always displays integrity and reliability in what he/she claims to portray (Schultz, 2010; Van Aswegen & Engelbrecht, 2009;

Ulrich *et al.*, 2008a). A HR credible activist resembles a HR professional who provides space and opportunity to listen to what management and the employees present, in order to informed decision. Cillie-Schmidt & Meyer (2008) assert that this competency is all about the individuals and how they present themselves to the organisation, management, and employees they serve.

The literature indicates that for HR professionals to prosper in what they do in the execution of their assignments, is not uniquely based on the body of knowledge they possess (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; Yasser Al Salman, 2009). Clearly, this implies that the HR professional needs to have more than just subject-matter expertise. Credibility in tackling the assignment at hand with dignity and confidence, and questioning the traditional ways of doing things, take courage. The boldness of an HR professional to think out of the box and to put forward great ideas that would take the organisation to the next level, is clearly what symbolises credibility (Yasser Al Salman, 2009).

- iii. **Capability builders** – The paucity of predetermined potential to define the organisational capabilities, might be detrimental. Determining the capabilities of an organisation through an exercise like a performance audit is of paramount importance (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). The futuristic goals and strategic thrust of an organisation are determined by proper and accurate capability audits (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). This assertion suggests that the HR professional with sound expertise in gathering information about the organisational strengths and capabilities, can guide the organisation. The capabilities referred to here should indicate what distinguishes the organisation from others, as well as clearly define the organisation in terms of market positioning (Erickson, 2007).
- iv. **Change champions** – The change champion competency denotes an HR role through which change could be proffered at both individual and organisational levels (Alfes, Truss & Gill, 2010). The current economic meltdown requires organisations to implement cost-reduction strategies without compromising enhanced performance – and to have proactive measures in place that will take the organisation to the next level (Rachele & Lawson, 2009:n.p). This implies that for HR professionals to be considered change agents, they need to be capable of altering the organisations' systems and of fostering a culture of change for the improvement of the organisation. The HR professional is required not only to

advance change, but further be a strategic advisor to management with regard to the management of change that advances improvement in the performance of individual employees, and the organisation in its entirety (Alfes *et al.*, 2010).

- v. **HR innovators and integrators** – Innovation for HR professionals is viewed in terms of exploring mechanisms which, when put together, should function in a way that helps deliver winning business solutions (Zahari, Pawanchik & Sulaiman, 2014). Furthermore, these authors declared that:

*Many of the challenges faced by an organisation wanting to innovate boils down to talent management, areas often directly under the influence of HR. In this study, we explore whether HR has become a partner yet in innovation. We make the case that it is imperative for HR to be a driver, while also being innovative in its own domain.*

Contemporary organisations require HR professionals to possess skills and abilities to converge HR practices that yield solutions for organisations. Stanleigh (n.d.) explains the HR innovation imperative, as follows: “Innovation is a collaborative process, where people in many fields contribute to the implementation of new ideas.”

In order for the HR profession to deliver innovative services to an organisation, it is clear – from the literature – that HR professionals must gain an insight into key HR practices such as the development and sourcing of talent for the advancement of the organisation. The sourcing of talent, rewarding talent, measurement of talent on performance, and strategic communication, fall within the realm of HR innovation and need to be managed strategically (Tan & Nasurdin, 2011). Furthermore, this competency requires that HR professionals acquire skills to uniquely turn fragmented HR and organisational practices into integrated solutions – so as to have an impact on business (Pinho *et al.*, 2012).

- vi. **Technology proponents** – The modern world has been overwhelmed by the use of technology which has brought about changes in the manner in which business transactions are conducted (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2014). The introduction of technology into the operations of organisations has further affected the influx of systems and

programmes that make the work of HR professionals much faster, more reliable, and convenient (Jared Lewis, n.d.; Jain, 2014). This is illustrated by the introduction of the internet, computer and related systems. The trends in the use of technological developments are essential in that they changed the way in which HR professionals do business in terms of executing their strategic role in the growth of organisation-related duties like communication, recruitment, record-keeping, access to information, social media, enhancement of organisational identity, and branding (Ulrich, 2012; Long, 2009). HR professionals using technology advancements have the advantage of delivering HR services easier in areas like connecting the internal workforce for communication and connecting with external customers and clients (Parry, n.d.).

The factors that constitute the HR competencies – as discussed above – are summarised in Table 3.6 (below):

**Table 3.6: HRCS (2012) Competency Domains and the Sub-factors of HR Competencies**

<b>Competency Domains</b>	<b>Sub-factors of Competence</b>
<b>Strategic positioner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interpreting global business context</li> <li>- Decoding customer expectations</li> <li>- Co-crafting a strategic agenda</li> </ul>
<b>Credible activist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Earning trust through results</li> <li>- Influencing and relating to others</li> <li>- Improving through self-awareness</li> <li>- Shaping the HR profession</li> </ul>
<b>Capability builder</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Capitalising on organisational capability</li> <li>- Aligning strategy, culture, practices, and behaviour</li> <li>- Creating a meaningful work environment</li> </ul>
<b>Change champion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initiating change</li> <li>- Sustaining change</li> </ul>
<b>HR innovator and integrator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Optimising human capital through workforce planning and analytics</li> <li>- Developing talent</li> <li>- Shaping organisational and communication practices</li> <li>- Driving performance</li> </ul>

<b>Technology proponent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving utility of HR operations</li> <li>- Connecting people through technology</li> <li>- Leveraging social-media tools</li> </ul>
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Source: Human Resource Competency Study (2012); Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank and Ulrich (2012).

### **3.2.7. South African Board of People Practices HR Competency Model**

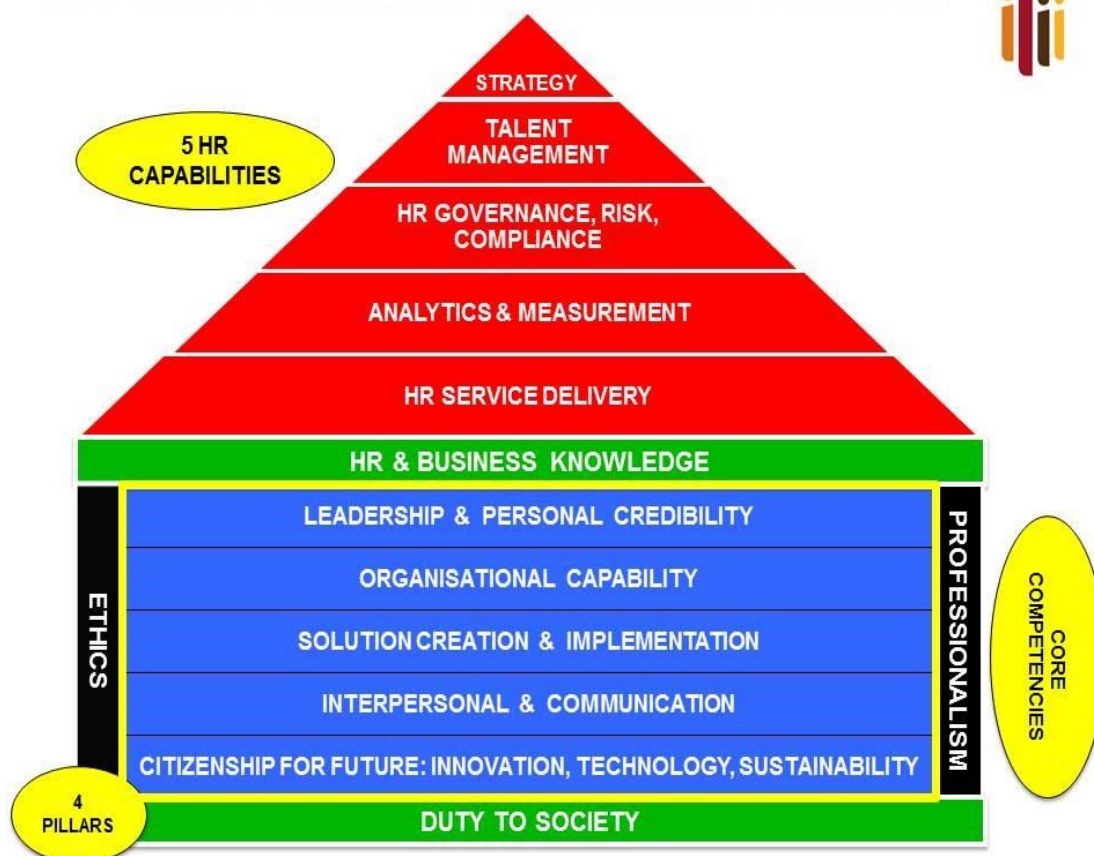
In 2011, the South African Board of People Practices (SABPP) in collaboration with Knowledge Resources, commissioned a research survey with the aim of finding out the requisite qualities that the world of work expects to be mastered by HR professionals in South Africa. SABPP then came up with a framework for the HR Competency Model – that takes into account the South African context. The SABPP HR Competency Model serves as a building block in terms of what knowledge and skills, attributes and capabilities the world of work in South Africa has distinguished as being imperative. In addition, the SABPP Model came about as a discourse to offer what the South African labour market perceives as being vital in terms of the competence of HR professionals. What is crucial in the SABPP HR Competency Model, is that, besides what is referred to as the five capabilities and four pillars in the model, there are clear core competencies that are an integral part of the model.

This interesting search for data led to the first HR Competency Model produced by an independent body striving for the recognition of HR in the history of South Africa. The data collected from various stakeholders – including industry, business entities and various HEIs – led to the first HR Competency Model by the SABPP in South Africa. The development of this latter model was an attempt by the SABPP to elevate the status of HR and to forge the recognition of HR as a respected and recognised profession – compared to an array of other professional bodies like law, medicine and others. Alongside the SABPP, other professional bodies that are recognised and accepted as professional, are the Health Professionals Council of South Africa, the Engineering Council of South Africa, the Federal bar Council of South Africa, the South African Institute of the Interior Design Professions, the South African Chefs' Association, The Institute of Risk Management (South Africa), and the he South African Institute of Chartered Accountants. All these professionally recognised bodies have gone through the stringent route of applying to be recognised by the South

African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) – as a professional body responsible for ensuring compliance with the required standards and quality.

In accordance with the regulation, any professional body that seeks to apply for professional recognition and practising purposes, is bound to comply with the *Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualification Framework Act 67 of 2008* – which was approved by the SAQA Board on 27 June 2012 and promulgated in the Government Gazette on 27 July 2012. An illustration of the SABPP HR Competency Model, with four main domains referred to as pillars, is shown in figure 3.4 below.

## SOUTH AFRICAN HR COMPETENCY MODEL

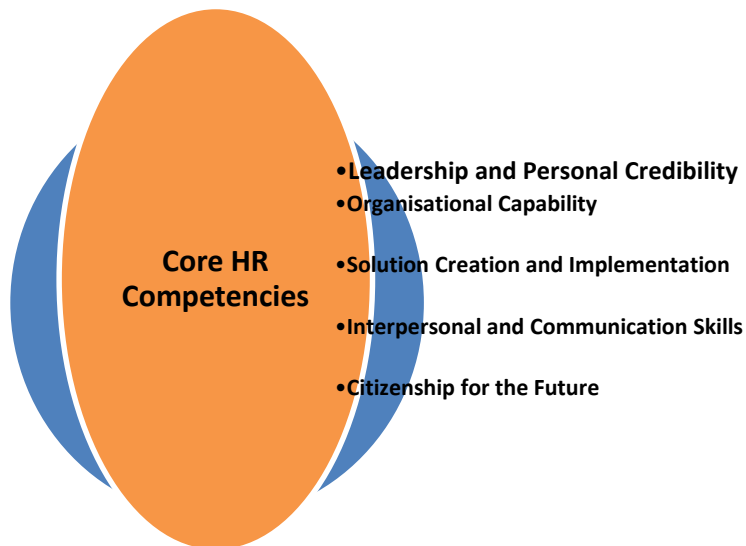


**Figure 3.4: The SABPP HR Competency Model**

Source: SABPP (South African Board for People Practices). (2012). Components of the National Competency Model.

Even though the background of the SABPP HR Competency Model was scrutinised holistically, the focus was on the five HR competencies of the SABPP, under the

component referred to as Core HR Competencies in Figure 3.5. Furthermore, this would ensure the research and surveys done by SABPP on required HR competencies, indicate a common trend with other global entities researching HR competencies.



**Figure 3.5: The Core HR Competencies, as exemplified in the South African Board of People Practices HR Competency Model**

Reference to the SABPP HR Competency Model was meant to indicate the manner in which HR has improved in research, and how much the body of knowledge in the HR profession has grown in responding to the needs of the evolving world of work in South Africa. The work by the SABPP, which is a professional body responsible for setting standards, has put the HR profession on the map – and also further demonstrated how serious the profession is about increasing its move towards reaching the international standards of other global players in the field of HR.

### **3.3. CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF HR COMPETENCY MODELS**

Various studies in the literature have indicated that HR competencies put HR professionals in a better position in terms of equipping HR professionals with the best insight and knowledge – that enables them to perform better (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; Yasser Al Salman, 2009). In essence, mastery of competence alone, without

contextual relevance, renders the HR professional inactive due to underperformance which is still experienced (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012).

The advancement and evolution of the HR competency models spanned specific periods: 1987, 1992, 2002, 2008 and 2012. The 2012 period marked the most crucial development and breakthrough in terms of data from the survey of Ulrich and associates (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012). The survey got the most significant responses from countries, including Australia, China, India, Latin America, the Middle East, Turkey, Northern Europe, and South Africa. Data also were collected in North America and Central Europe. Besides the data collected by Ulrich and associates since 1987 – the study also consulted and reviewed other competency models.

It is a given that tremendous research work has been done on HR competencies and how these actually contribute to impacting on the performance of organisations. The literature clearly, and in numerous ways, has indicated that the empowerment of the workforce – especially HR professionals – has put organisations in an advantaged position to compete with others in the global labour market (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008a; Caldwell, 2008; Ashkezari & Aeen, 2012; Caldwell, 2010). Donzelli *et al.* (2006) aver that HR competencies that are matched with business processes, can yield better results. In their report on research on the HR competency-related model, Ashkezari and Aeen (2012) state:

*The findings highlight the limitations of business partner competency models and they raise important questions about how business partnering will develop in the future as HR roles are further stretched in the ever-ambitious drive to link HR with business performance outcomes.*

This assertion implies daunting work that still needs to be done by the HR profession – as the evolution of HR competencies seems to be an infinite exercise. This stands to reason, given the changing patterns of work in organisations across the global village. The new technology-related changes that have engulfed the world of work

globally, call for rapid research that will keep businesses abreast of developments – in terms of the manner in which organisations operate – in order to remain relevant in the world of work.

In addition, the differences in a series of HR competencies, and deciding which competencies may be the most needed in the world of work, remain issues to be resolved (Ulrich *et al.*, 2008a; Tyson & Shaun, 1995). There is also a worrying trend among researchers on HR competency models that suggests ineffectiveness of the “generic and context-independent” models (Ashkezari & Aeen, 2012). Ashkezari and Aeen (2012) identified an issue that needed attention, as being the controversy over the effectiveness of varying HR competency models developed in different parts of the world – under diverse circumstances, and influenced by diverse cultures.

There is, however, concern that studies on HR competency models lack profound evidence to link HR strategies with organisational strategy and with success (Caldwell, 2010; Ashkezari & Aeen, 2012). In addition, the literature suggests that business partner competency models face a challenge of keeping up with the perennial evolution of HR and the expertise required to perform optimally (Abdullah & Sentosa, 2012; Tyson & Fell, 1986). Contemporary organisations keep on requiring new and different competency models, in order to keep up with the trends in the labour market, in terms of the new talent that can enable businesses to increase performance outputs (Keegan, 2006). Furthermore, Abdullah and Sentosa (2012) surmise that there is a lack of literature on the development of competency models for the field of HR, especially models and frameworks that could help HR professionals in the execution of their assignments.

Another factor posing profound challenges to HR and the competency models designed for the HR profession, is balancing and validating the financial implications of the performance of HR models – and the concomitant enhanced value to the organisations’ performance (Abdulla & Sentosa, 2012). Contrary to the tremendous progress made in the development of HR competency models geared towards

enhancing the impact and value of HR professionals, the literature still indicates that the HR profession's role in many organisations still continually receives less recognition (Becker & Huselid, 2006). This is evidenced by the growing trend of recognising other functional roles, like in finance, IT and marketing.

The other challenging factor with the development of competency models, is that various organisations develop models with varying purposes – that are geared towards achieving specific goals. These differences in purpose and goals lead to the difference in application and manner, in which the effectiveness of the models is measured (Athey *et al.*, 1999). Irrespective of the differences in competency models and the rationales behind individual approaches in building the model, the challenge that organisations have to grapple with, are ensuring that whichever competency models are developed – they must be clearly communicated and understood by all in the organisation. Furthermore, competency models must be seen as underpinning the mission, vision, and strategic objectives of an organisation. The emphasis is on linkage with the performance of the organisation (Baill, 1999; Brewster *et al.*, 2000).

While it is expected that HR professionals will display competency in their work, the competency models don't illustrate specific HR competencies required for their performance at different levels in organisations. Most HR competency models indicate umbrella competencies which are required for performance in organisations – without distinguishing the essential requirements at various levels of performance. According to Ulrich *et al.* (2009b), this assertion is complemented by the multifaceted business challenges that are brought by the latest technology, globalisation, and markets. These challenges point to the fact that the reconfiguration of the HR function – with emphasis on building anew relevant models that depict specific requirements at various career levels of the organisation – will be a necessity in the near future.

Buckley and Monks (2004) state that there is a challenge of empirically presenting a clear description of both the functional and behavioural HR competencies needed for the success of the HR profession. Boselie and Paauwe (2005) and Buckley and Monks

(2004) argue that research in HR competency models is not explicitly clear on the level of “*business knowledge*” that can confirm that HR professionals are effective in their strategic roles. Ulrich *et al.* (2008a, 2012) aver that the major concern of the world of work, which is linking the HR strategy with organisational strategy for performance purposes, could be tackled by the implementation of the suggested six HR competencies, introduced out of 139 competency descriptions.

In emphasising the evolution and evidence of the improvement in the HR Competency Models and how they managed to achieve their goals, comments from HR Competency Model research bear testimony. Various high-level executives, CEOs, Presidents, and MDs from industry, as well as renowned researchers, commend the work done on HR competencies. Verbatim comments are:

*This definitive work on HR competencies provides ideas and tools that help HR professionals develop their career and make their organization effective.*

– Edward E. Lawler III, Professor, University of Southern California.

*This book is a crucial blueprint of what it takes to succeed. A must have for every HR professional* – Lynda Gratton, Professor, London Business School.

*One single concept changed the HR world forever: ‘HR business partner’. Through consistent cycles of research and practical application, Dave and his team have produced and updated the most comprehensive set of HR competencies ever* – Horacio Quiros, President, World Federation of People Management Associations.

*Packed with facts, evidence, and prescriptive advice. It is about being a business leader first, and an HR professional second* – Randy MacDonald, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, IBM Corporation.

*The concepts and competencies presented in this book provide HR leaders with new insights – Gina Qiao, Senior Vice President, HR Lenovo.*

*Powerful, relevant and timely! Defines "new HR" in a pragmatic way. This book is a must for leaders and HR folks who seek to create sustainable competitive advantage – Satish Pradhan, Chief, Group Human Resources, Tata Sons Limited.*

*You can't argue with the data! This book is a definitive and practical guide to learning the HR competencies for success – John Lynch, Senior Vice President, HR, General Electric.*

*A must read for any HR executive. This research-based competency model is particularly compelling because it is informed by the perspective of non-HR executives and stakeholders – Sue Meisinger, Distinguished speaker and author, former CEO of SHRM.*

*Read this book for a unique long-term perspective on where HR competencies have brought us and must take us in future – John Boudreau, Professor, University of Southern California and Research Director, Center for Effective Organizations.*

Furthermore, the following endorsements were very encouraging and provide hope for the HR profession. The endorsements from the books by Ulrich and associates and other authors in the area of HR Competency Models, should be commended and recognised. Endorsements and commendations are (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012):

*'HR from the Outside In' is a must read for all HR professionals. Grounded in research, case studies and their experience the authors provide insights and tools that HR professionals everywhere can use to increase their effectiveness in driving business value and making a difference in*

*organizational performance* – Carole Watkins, Chief Human Resources Officer, Cardinal Health, Inc.

*For more than 20 years, David Ulrich has set the direction for HR: evolving the community from an operational mindset to becoming a strategic business partner. This book, "HR From the Outside-In", takes us in yet a new direction and caused a fundamental shift in my thinking that grounded me in the reality that my strategy and agenda, currently internally focused, could break new ground by incorporating the voices of our external customers in everything "we DO". The principles, concepts and competencies presented in the book take our practice to a new and even more strategic level; providing HR leaders with new insights to bring to business leaders and thereby enabling a company's competitive advantage and sustainable growth* – Jian (Gina) Qiao, SVP HR, Lenovo.

*Insightful and thought provoking. This book is a culmination of years of research behind the HR profession and new insights that challenge us to focus on "the business of the business" and to look from the "outside-in" to create real value for our company* – Marcia Mendes-d'Abreu, OTHP.

*Talent has moved to the top of CEOs' agendas as they become increasingly aware of the criticality of their firm's human capital to organizational success. They look to the HR function to deliver that talent, but the question is do HR functions possess the functional talent to deliver on the CEO's agenda? HR from the Outside provides a state of the art look at the HR talent necessary to drive business success as well as how functions can develop that talent* – Patrick M. Wright, William J. Conaty GE Professor of Strategic HR School, ILR Cornell University.

*'HR From the Outside In' provides an intriguing look at the next horizon for HR, and our role in providing insights, innovative practices and building capabilities that ensure and enhance business success. By being 'plugged in' to the external market, understanding stakeholder needs and macro-trends and creating aligned solutions through powerful partnerships, HR is in a unique position to both influence and drive the organizational change agenda. This book makes a compelling case for change, and provides a sound roadmap for raising the game in HR – Judy A. Zagorski, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, BASF Corporation.*

*One single concept changed the entire HR world two decades ago: "HR business partner". It was just a good and intelligent idea, but it soon became the beginning of a new era in people management.*

*Through consistent cycles of research, studies and practical application around the world, Dave Ulrich and his team have managed to produce and update the most comprehensive set of HR competencies ever.*

*The latest news is that becoming "HR Credible Activists" is vital but not enough to succeed. To learn why, we must go deep into this enticing, essential book.*

*With the new "Outside In" approach, Dave - as a modern times Copernicus - helps us turn the HR world inside out – Horacio Quiros, President, World Federation of People Management Associations.*

### **3.4. SYNTHESIS OF VARIOUS HR COMPETENCIES ACCORDING TO THE LABOUR MARKET**

The literature on the various HR models consulted clearly suggests that HR – in terms of its functions and skills, and the manner in which it is organised to perform and deliver services – should be aligned with the broader organisational strategy through the conversion of its current HR competency model. To constitute an appropriate current HR model that could help organisations to improve on delivering services

competitively, would probably have to involve professionals and practitioners with contemporary in-depth knowledge and understanding of the HR competencies in organisations. This leads to the necessity for requisite HR skills and competencies that are connected to the achievement of the core strategic objectives of the organisation which are fundamental for success – since this would show the value of HR in the organisation.

The literature review identified various HR competencies that the authors of HR models perceived as being relevant in the job market. These competencies were reflected in several HR models studied, and Table 3.7 (below) depicts the HR qualities that were recurrently cited as fundamental by the employer community. An analysis of all seven HR Competency Models was done via the grouping of similar HR qualities that emerged mostly in all HR models. Borrowing from the definition of Delgado *et al.* (2014:4) on the meaning of clustering in qualitative research, the researcher applied clustering analysis to gain insight into the distribution of data on HR competencies that appeared as related in the different competency models reviewed. The clustering process revealed HR competencies like change management, technical HR management, project management, personal and interpersonal relationships, vision and strategy, and lastly, the leadership competency.

<b>Change Management Competencies</b>	<b>Technical HR Management</b>	<b>Project Management</b>	<b>Personal and Interpersonal Relations</b>	<b>Vision and Strategy</b>	<b>Leadership Competency</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Business and organisational knowledge</li> <li>. Championing diversity</li> <li>. Team player</li> <li>. Transformation acumen</li> <li>. Conflict resolution</li> <li>. Auctioning and research</li> <li>. Taking calculated risks</li> <li>. Time management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. HR planning</li> <li>. HR professionalism</li> <li>. Delivery of good HR practices</li> <li>. HR context</li> <li>. People management</li> <li>. Communication</li> <li>. Initiative/ drive to achieve set goal/s</li> <li>. Quality decision-making acumen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Project initiation and planning</li> <li>. Project sponsorship</li> <li>. Technology savvy (HRIS specifically,)</li> <li>. Capability to develop long range</li> <li>. Priority management</li> <li>. Set up and management of budget</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Effective communication</li> <li>. Negotiations</li> <li>. Customer focus</li> <li>. Building of good relationships</li> <li>. Knowledge-sharing expertise</li> <li>. Listening</li> <li>. Bonding agent</li> <li>. Building trust</li> <li>. Leveraging diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. HR strategy and plan</li> <li>. Business or organisational strategy</li> <li>. Vision and mission statement</li> <li>. Strategy positioning/ alignment with culture and practices</li> <li>. Situational analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Goal setting for team and self</li> <li>. Ability to manage oneself</li> <li>. Futuristic focus</li> <li>. Knowledge and development capacity</li> <li>. People management</li> </ul>

**Table 3.7: Human Resource (HR) competency analysis, with specific behavioural competencies**

As a result, the main HR requirements were coded and integrated to form the basis for a new HR model that featured contemporary HR qualities. The HR qualities in Table 3.7 emanated from various HR models consulted and the literature reviewed. A succinct discussion on each domain of HR competency is presented in the sections below:

### **3.4.1. Change management**

The concept of change management in the context of this study primarily was about the emphasis on principles and processes for managing people in an organisation that undergoes change as a result of specific desired objectives (*cf.* Hiatt, 2006; Bridges, 2003). The emphasis was on the supposition that change normally goes hand-in-hand

with an element of transformation, and also focuses and impacts on both the organisation and the people (*cf.* Eriksen, 2008). As a transformation mechanism, change management results from the need to align with the vision of the organisation, improvement in relationships and job satisfaction, and motivation that leads to improved performance (Parish *et al.*, 2008). The behavioural competencies identified with change management involve appreciating individual behaviour and fast-tracking the work-flow changes, as required by a particular transformation need. Change management encompasses a variety of issues like process change, a new technology, or reorganisation. Conversely, organisational change management competency is believed to be inclusive and is not just application on a particular, defined change (Schwarz & Shulman, 2007). Change management addresses issues around the building of distinct competencies of the workforce and its management team. The desired outcome of any change-management process is the ability of top management to effect strategic direction for the organisation (Stead & Stead, 2013).

### **3.4.2. Technical HR skills**

As people become the key competitive advantage in any industry, the human resource (HR) professional needs to develop the overall knowledge of the HR function. The inherent knowledge and expertise of the HR professional will mean knowing all facets of the HR function, and various components of the profession. The technical knowledge of the HR profession should be broad and enable a professional to solve issues like understanding and evaluating technical information related to the job, advising others on technical issues, compensation, employee development, HR information systems, performance management systems, workforce planning, legislation-related regulations, employee benefits, employee relations, labour relations, recruitment and placement (SHRM:n.d.).

### **3.4.3. HR leadership**

At its central root, leadership is about the ability to direct human capital with the ultimate goal of achieving organisational goals (Cammock, 2003). The leadership function is charged with the responsibility of achieving a particular end product or

service that benefits the business. An HR leader needs to be a professional with the vision, strategy and a clear goal of the HR team. Leadership in HR encompasses a clearly-defined purpose, shared responsibility that empowers the team to achieve a set standard, and strategic input to the realisation of a broader organisational strategic goal (Bass & Bass, 2008). The HR leadership needs to articulate clearly the shared benefit and responsibility of individual employees that enhances the chances of the organisation to thrive in the competitive environment. As a result, HR leadership should ensure synergy of purpose with the rest of the organisational leaders – to be part of the redesign strategies that help in the delivery of the core mandate of various divisions (Holbeche, 2010). Holbeche (2010) further indicates that HR leadership is about giving direction, motivation, strengthening team work, and leading change.

#### **3.4.4. Project management**

The rationale and purpose of project management competency seeks to argue that project management skills are utilised to achieve specific goals, milestones and clear deliverables (Burke, 2010). An HR professional with project management skills can convert strategies into manageable and achievable goals (*cf.* Kerzner, 2009). Gray and Larson (2006) attest that project management is a scientific tool that helps in the management of resources meant to achieve a specific goal or deliverable. Project management defines the scope of, and time to be spent on each activity – as well as quality assurance right through the duration of the project (Burke, 2010; Schmidt, 2009). Without project management skills expertise and knowledge, it would be very difficult for an organisation to successfully execute a project within the constraints of time, scope and quality assurance, and also deliver the required results. In other words, there has to be a framework and a defined way of doing things – to ensure there is a structure in project management.

#### **3.4.5. Vision and strategy**

The prerequisite for any organisation to operate within the developed global village, is the formulation of a proper and eloquent vision and strategy (Madu, 2013). This defines the rationale for existence and the trajectory to be followed, in order to achieve

set objectivities. Knowledge of vision and strategy formulation, definition and implementation, is paramount for any professional. This is the why HR professionals should be on top of the game when strategic issues that impact on vision and strategy are deliberated. The ability for the team to grab hold of and be inspired by the knowledge of the company vision, has been demonstrated throughout the business world (Senge, 2006). Primarily, a vision and strategy should encompass clear direction and futuristic priorities of the organisation (Li & Solis, 2013). The process of vision and strategy formulation is primarily for the success of any organisation – as it charts the way forward and defines the direction the business takes, as well as specifying central goals.

#### **3.4.6. Personal and interpersonal relations**

Personal and interpersonal relations are crucial for any professional building solid relationships (Kim *et al.*, 2008; Scott *et al.*, 2008). As Scott *et al.* (2008) explain, personal and interpersonal characters play a critical role – even in the academic world. Therefore, HR graduates and professionals, as students from the world of academia, are also bound to develop and master the art of personal and interpersonal competence in their everyday situations (Seal *et al.*, 2015). The personal and interpersonal traits help one to be able to get along with others and to embrace issues like pioneering initiatives, the ability to support others, and being open about oneself (Harvey & Knight, n.d.). However, understanding the self and how one is similar to or different to others, is also regarded as the foundation of interpersonal competence. The concept of personal and interpersonal competency is a vast area and will not be discussed at length in this study.

Ferris *et al.* (2006) argue that through the ability to effectively network with others, employees can position themselves to create and take advantage of opportunities. This translates into the fact that the networking ability which involves interacting with others, can arguably build beneficial alliances in an organisation. The study attempted to uncover and present a set of HR competencies that were mostly sought after by modern organisations. The literature provided an indication of the HR competencies

in the HR competency models discussed earlier in the chapter. In some HR models, it was found that researchers differed slightly regarding the terminology used for competencies – but the essence and meaning were found to be the same.

The popularity of the competencies in the HR models suggests that they can indeed help the broad organisational strategic thrust to succeed – since they are perceived to be aligned with work and business goals. As a result of the development of the competencies in the HR profession, HR graduates and professionals alike, need to be attuned to customer and investor expectations through their contribution to the strategic objectives of the organisation. The research conducted in South Africa by Pietersen and Engelbrecht (2005), clearly indicates a link between organisational competencies and the strategic strategy. The HR strategy and organisational strategy need to back each other up, with the former playing a support role. The interrelated process of the HR department and other organisational functions, will enable HR professionals to contribute to their organisations' success.

### **3.5. CONCLUSION**

It is apparent that the competency-based models discussed in this chapter have brought about great development in the field of HR. The literature on HR Competency Models clearly suggests that the implementation of HR competencies and skills sets, as well as the knowledge, will enable HR professionals to contribute significantly to the overall strategic thrust of the organisation. In addition, the literature study indicates clearly that the HR profession has the potential to make the greatest impact in organisations. This is possible if HR and management mutually create firm working relationships and further aspire to be on the same wavelength in terms of striving for implementation of organisational strategy, its implications for improved performance, and gaining a competitive edge in the market. The implementation of HR strategies presented to management will also be cascaded with ease – as HR will be positioned to play its rightful role in organisations.

Another fundamental issue in this study is the relevance and global impact of the HR curriculum and the resultant programmes. The higher education fraternity needs to

play a critical role by shaping and improving the HR curriculum and programmes that will ensure a value-add cohort of graduates, that provide best experience and performance to organisations and the HR profession. The latest HR models need to be seen as being informative in terms of improving on the design and improvement of the HR curricula and programmes. This will be useful in helping organisations to configure their practices.

This chapter clearly demonstrated that, in the business context, the bar has been raised for the HR profession and that HR is expected to offer more strategic inputs to organisations to thrive – unlike in the past when HR was seen as a mere custodian of redundant and insignificant labour policies and a liability to organisations. The HR profession and its professionals are clearly challenged to play a more strategic and interactive role, that advances organisational goals.

# *Chapter Four*

## *Research design and methodology*

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the methods and techniques employed in the data-collection process of the study. The researcher attempted to expose the fundamental HR qualities that the world of work perceives as being crucial in helping HR professionals to execute their work effectively. The research design and methodology used in the study are discussed in detail. As with all research, this study is based on some fundamental philosophical assumptions in terms of what constitutes valid research, and which research methods should be employed – that would be appropriate for the development of knowledge. In this chapter the focus is on the philosophical assumptions applicable to the study, and also the design strategies underpinning the research. Furthermore, the discussion covers the sampling process, data-collection methods and data analysis. In addition, this chapter also discusses the trustworthiness of the study and ethical considerations applicable to the study.

### **4.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design is described as the plan or blueprint of how the researcher intends to conduct the study (Fouché & de Vos, 2001:137). Even though this definition is mainly used for quantitative studies, Shuttleworth (2008) and Trochim (2006) maintain that qualitative research design is also mostly used by qualitative researchers to study human behaviour. The qualitative school prefers to call methodologies such as phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory “strategies of enquiry”, that may be used to design qualitative strategies (Fouché, 2001:271). Creswell (1998:2) defines design in qualitative studies as the “entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing the narrative”.

In qualitative research, the coverage of research design is mostly limited to frequently used forms such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory,

ethnography, and case studies (Creswell, 2014). The grounded theory, which is a theory derived from data when analysing data when analysing qualitative data, is applied in this study as it draws its orientation from the premise of an interaction grounded in the views of participants (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the grounded theory would be realised via multiple stages of data collection and its refinement as based on the perceptions of HR practitioners regarding the expertise, knowledge, skills set and competencies as requisite qualities needed for HR contemporary HR professionals (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The study applied the grounded theory as interpretations in this inquiry are derived from raw data. (Creswell, 2014). The HR qualities emerged as participants voiced their views and perceptions on what is deemed to be relevant for a competent and well-versed HR professional in the labour market. The use of qualitative methods such as the literature review, the data analysis from documents and open-ended questionnaire to gather information on requisite HR qualities further defined research questions. The grounded theory, as a research design for the study, was further used in the process of developing themes. The themes developed as a result of reading the text and coding specific examples of aspects where participants mentioned frequently emerging HR qualities. In this study coding is understood and interpreted as the process of reviewing notes that would enable the discovery of common themes.

Given the assertion in the foregoing paragraph, it is clear that grounded theory is relevant as it is dynamic in that it can be continually revised throughout almost all phases of the study. While the end result of a grounded theory study was meant to generate some broad themes, the researcher is not making an attempt to generalize the study in the same objective way characteristic of quantitative research. In Schurink (2004d:2), it is averred that

*'that grounded theory is a particular inductive approach consisting of a systematically developed set of procedures and techniques to devise a theoretical concept about the life world of some selected group of people who form part of a particular social reality'.*

The grounded theory, a qualitative research design in this study, is seen as an open approach to research, which allows the researcher to develop themes based on the data collected versus traditional methodology techniques of merely basing data on previously existing theories. The benefits of applying grounded theory as a research design for this study is premised around the fact that it includes the freedom apportioned to participants to convey freely their views without any constraints and allows what is relevant to emerge (Burden & Roodt, 2007).

In the case of this research, engagement with participants via questionnaire and perusing advertisements and going through the literature review gathering data on requisite HR qualities provided the study with a vast understanding of what it takes to achieve the goal of successful being a competent HR professional in contemporary organisations. Furthermore, the question on how to provide a continuous flow of high quality academic research in HR management must be increasingly be seen as a vital mechanism for transferring expertise out of universities into society and the broader world of work. To this end, the study has made an attempt to address important issues concerning the application of grounded theory and its relevance to HR management research. The thrust and focus was mainly on the feasibility of grounded theory as a design on HR management research with emphasis on the objective of providing an understanding of this established approach in social sciences for qualitative data analysis. The purpose has been to identify the foundations of this research and its implications in the HR management research.

The focus on text in qualitative data, in contrast with quantitative data which focuses on numbers, is the most important feature that forms the basis of qualitative analysis. Patton (2002:114) stated that the text that qualitative researchers normally analyse, often comprises transcripts of interviews, notes, or documents taken from participant observation during the data-collection of a research project. In this study, the researcher analysed document texts as sources of data that made inferences about experiences of the employer community in relation to HR graduates who were newly employed in various organisations. According to Patton (2002:114), texts are regarded

as one other source of data through which interpretation could lead to meaningful conclusions (see also Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In addition, Patton (2014: 2) contends that

*The meaning of text, then, is negotiated among a community of interpreters, and to the extent that some agreement is reached about the meaning at a particular time and place – that meaning can only be based on consensual community validation*

According to Schutt (2014) argued that basic data emanate from observations and conversations, which are the actual words of people reproduced to the best of the researcher's ability from the field notes.

Miller and Daly (2013:5) assert that in qualitative research, the analysis of data based on people's experiences and stories, leads to improved understanding of their situation. Thus, in the data collection process, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of the employer community in terms of the qualities demonstrated by the newly employed HR graduates. In addition, the study sought to make sense of what employers perceived as being fundamental HR competencies that the higher education programme designer would consider as being critical in the development of HR curricula (McKimm, 2007). McKimm (2007) suggested that programme design should entail the needs of students and other stakeholders e.g. the industry.

#### **4.2.1. Research approach**

Merriam (1998:4) defines qualitative research as an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that enable us to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena. On the other hand, Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) maintain that qualitative research entails multiple methods – including an interpretivism method or adhering to the interpretivism theory. The implication derived from this assertion is that qualitative researchers study contemporary phenomena in their natural settings (Lichtman, 2012). In the interpretivism paradigm, researchers construe that reality is a construct of the human mind, where people perceive the world in similar but not necessarily the same ways. Therefore, an attempt to find meanings from people or to interpret

phenomena is seen as being central in the application of the interpretivism theory. The meanings derived from the interpretivism theory clearly demonstrate that people do have different understandings of the world – depending on their perceptions.

De Vos and Schutze (2002:5-6) assert that the social sciences – in which specific aspects of human behaviour, interaction, conventions, creations and more are investigated – deal with the study of people. In order to study aspects of human society and human phenomena, specific approaches to research are employed (the qualitative approaches) – amongst which the most used are the positivist, interpretivism and critical approaches to research. The interpretivism approach is based on understanding the everyday, lived experiences of people in specific settings. This understanding focuses spontaneously on naturalistic methods such as interviewing and observation, and the analysis of existing texts (Merriam, 2009:13). It emphasises the close examination of texts to find the meaning embedded in the words (written or spoken) of the participants.

The rationale to apply qualitative research for this study was premised on the fact that it provided the opportunity to conduct a field-focused, interpretivism study – with detailed descriptions and interpretations of participants' meanings and their settings (*cf.* Creswell, 1994; Angen, 2000). The researcher opted for an interpretivism approach as it appreciates the value of qualitative data which essentially are based on meanings which are expressed through text, words and language. As the interpretivism stance was applied in this study, the data that were collected were mostly written – which means information was gathered from documents and through questionnaires. The purpose of the research was to advance knowledge by describing and interpreting a specific phenomenon in the world of work, and to arrive at shared meanings among members of a group.

#### **4.2.2. Research methodology**

The empirical research phase involved a discussion on data-collection methods and an introduction to data analysis and interpretation. The data collected included qualitative information sourced by means of a literature review or search, and a

analysis of documents – namely the job advertisement extracted from various websites and the sending out of an open-ended questionnaire to collect data from the labour market. As illustrated by the discussion in the literature review (Chapters 2 & 3), the researcher reviewed research articles to gain a clear understanding of the context of the topic under study – in order to be in a position to provide a true view of the reality that is important to participating organisations and individuals.

According to Polit and Hungler (2004:233), methodology refers to ways of obtaining, organising and analysing data. Methodology decisions depend on the nature of the research question. Methodology in research can be considered to be about the process and methods followed to arrive at a valid and correct scientific decision (Forman, Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski, Krein (2008). After carefully studying the literature on research methodology, the researcher chose to apply methods that would serve the purpose of effectively addressing the research problem as unambiguously as possible, in the endeavour to find answers to the research question. These methods typically include how data are to be collected, what instruments will be employed, how the instruments will be used, and the intended means for analysing the collected data.

#### **4.2.3. Data collection**

Creswell (2009) and Locke, Silverman and Spirduso (2010), posit that the common sources of data in qualitative research are interviews, observations, and the review of documents. Yin (2009) and Merriam (2009) also assert that the qualitative research approach has been referred to as the logic that links collected data and the conclusions that are drawn to respond to the initial questions of the study. This study relied on the analysis of documents as the first set of data on HR qualities gathered from job advertisements. The collection of the second set of data was interpretivism in nature – as the researcher used questionnaires to determine what the world of work perceived as being paramount when employing HR graduates and determining the most critical HR qualities in HR professionals.

The source of documents were advertisements that specified the requisite HR qualities in terms of skills and knowledge – as expected of HR professionals by the employer community. Document analysis, as a qualitatively orientated method, was applied to gain an in-depth insight into the phenomenon under investigation (*cf.* Weine, Knafl, Feetham, Kulauzovic, Klebic & Sclove, 2005). The narrative analysis method was applied to establish and understand what the perceptions and experiences of the employer community were about in terms of HR graduates in the workplace.

To verify the data gathered from the documents, the researcher collected a second set of data using open-ended questionnaires that were sent to companies that employed HR graduates. The researcher intended to gather sufficient data to be able to outline the profile of an ideal HR professional that the job market desires.

#### **4.2.4. Methods of data collection**

The literature review, document analysis and an open-ended questionnaire were applied in the empirical study, to gather and analyse data. The data collected were used in the study to bring about an understanding of what the labour market needs and expects from HR professionals. Furthermore, the aim of the data collection was to establish what the employers regarded as skills, knowledge and attributes desired from the HR profession.

It also was fundamental to determine how employers experienced graduates that exited from training in HR programmes and entered the world of work. The professionals and graduates should have acquired skills that attest to the relevance of their training in terms of theoretical knowledge, technical skills and competencies – as well as general attributes required. The three methods of data collection applied in the study – the synthesis of HR competencies provided in the HR models, the document analysis and narrative inquiry (open-ended questionnaire) – thus were seen as applicable methods to be used to gather data to provide empirical evidence to answer

the research questions. The above-mentioned data-collection methods for employers' expectations and job requirements, are described in more detail in the section below.

#### **4.2.4.1. Literature review as a method of data collection**

In chapter two it has been clearly explained that detailed job qualities and specific sets of knowledge, skills and attributes were a requirement and also fundamental for organisations to realise good performance (Felstead *et al.*, 2007). Several HR competency models were examined and a set of HR competencies that primarily featured in most of the HR models studied, were identified. The search for HR competencies via the literature review or search as a method of data collection, was used as informed by Marrelli (2005: n.d.), who commented that:

*A literature review is the identification, reading, summarization, and evaluation of previously published articles, books, reports, or Internet entries on a particular topic. Sometimes the review may also encompass unpublished documents such as dissertations, manuals, or personal correspondence.*

Furthermore, another avowal by Goode and Hutt (1952: n.d.) reads thus:

*A literature search is a relatively economical and efficient way of collecting relevant data and has a high potential for payoff.*

According to Cronin, Ryan and Coughlan (2008), the literature review can be useful in gathering relevant data for the phenomenon under study. Cronin *et al.* (2008:2) stated that "This type of review (narrative literature review) is useful in gathering together a volume of literature in a specific subject area and summarizing and synthesizing it". Drawing on this, the study sought to gather data by means of the literature search covering different HR competency models, and to summarise and synthesise it. This led the study to discover the most inherent HR qualities, knowledge and skills, competencies and attributes that were perceived to be relevant to the HR profession. A summarised and synthesised version of clusters or domains of HR competencies that frequently emerged as fundamental in positioning the HR professionals to perform competently, was discussed in length in chapter three.

#### **4.2.4.2. Document analysis as a method of data collection**

Mensah, Bawole and Ahenkan (2013:149) described document analysis as “a procedure for the categorisation of verbal or behavioural data, for purposes of classification, summarisation and tabulation”. Furthermore, Bowel (2009: 1) described the content and document analysis as ‘systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents- both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material’. As it is the case with any qualitative analysis, the document or document tent analysis method of data collection in this study will gather data, examine and interpret in order to derive meaningful inferences about the requisite needs of the labour market. The qualitative document analysis is applied in this study with the aim of gaining understanding and developing empirical knowledge via the review of documents as the primary source of qualitative data (Bowen, 2009:2). This approach will be applied in terms of getting perceptions of the world of work regarding the HR qualities and what could inform the basis of curricula development and the review of programme planning and design. The document analysis method was applied to collect, process and interpret data, and finally identify relevant HR requirements from job advertisements as required by different organisations and sectors that represent the job market.

A collection of 52 HR advertisements was selected after compiling a database that focused on the requirements in terms of education, experience, knowledge and competencies of the applicants for HR positions. The following websites were visited for data collection: [www.careers24.com](http://www.careers24.com), [www.hireresolve.co.za](http://www.hireresolve.co.za), and [www.pnet.co.za](http://www.pnet.co.za). To ensure a comprehensive representation of requirements for HR professionals, the advertisements were selected based on industry, province, job title, focus area, and contract. This process enabled the researcher to formulate a set of clear criteria based on the advertisements and this was included on the database. The population targeted ranged from senior HR manager and middle managers, through to entry-level positions at management level.

In order to discover the most sought-after HR job qualities, the above websites advertised vacancies in all the provinces of South Africa and neighbouring countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, and a small number of vacancies for HR jobs in other parts of the world like Europe, Northern America and Australia. As a result, the data also included HR requirements sought by international organisations that had operations in South Africa.

#### **4.2.4.3. Open-ended questionnaire as a method of data collection**

The questionnaire was distributed by electronic mail to the employer community, in order to gain an understanding of what fundamental qualities were prerequisites in the world of work when appointing HR professionals and graduates. The open-ended questionnaire was intended to get a narrative account of responses from the labour market. Riessman (2008) maintains that, in recent years, the development of narrative analysis has given life to the study of narratives – as a form of information for social research. This helps researchers to understand ways in which people make and use stories to interpret a phenomenon under study from the perspective of the world in which they live. The researcher's own interpretation of the narratives as a written account of a particular situation, also provides a broader and inclusive definition that acknowledges the point referred to by Riessman (2008).

The process of administering the questionnaire was aimed at gathering more information – to gain an understanding of what HR employers perceived as being most relevant in terms of the job requirements that needed to be displayed by HR graduates and professionals. This was done to gain information that would help derive an understanding of the experiences, perceptions and observations of the employer community regarding the requisite HR competencies the world of work demands, and to derive useful meanings that would inform the study findings. The data were collected by using the database of HR graduates' employers. As the participants were purposefully selected and the employer community appointed people from a pool of HR graduates trained in various HEIs in South Africa, a proper reflection and coverage of the local HR employer market was ensured. Within this context, narrative inquiry

seemed to be the appropriate method to gather data that would be relevant and accurate regarding the HR competencies required by the world of work.

The open-ended questionnaire was developed and distributed through the SurveyMonkey computer programme to identified HR employers – requesting their response to the questions. The questionnaire, as a self-administered method, comprised two types of questions: closed questions about biographical/demographic information which were coded, and open-ended questions for respondents to write answers – providing them more freedom to share information. The websites that were instrumental in gathering data for document analysis included [www.careers24.com](http://www.careers24.com), [www.hireresolve.co.za](http://www.hireresolve.co.za), and [www.pnet.co.za](http://www.pnet.co.za), *Careerjunction* and *Gumtree job*. On the other hand, the open-ended questionnaire was used for collection of narrative data) during the first and second quarter of 2013. In order to demarcate the study findings, the data-collection process was divided into two separate sequential periods between 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively. The gathering of information on HR job requirements over a two-year period, was meant to trace consistencies of HR job requirements by the job market over a specific period. What also necessitated this process, was establishing whether there was any significant change in HR job requirements – as the literature indicated evolving patterns of requirements by contemporary organisations in the 21st Century. The researcher compiled an open-ended questionnaire regarding the current practices of HR professionals – based on the findings of the literature review and document analysis. The SurveyMonkey was used as the primary data collection instrument that was meant to manage the open-ended questionnaire. The open-ended questionnaire was sent to HR employers with specific attention to management and newly appointed HR practitioners. A user-friendly online open-ended questionnaire was compiled based on the template created by the researcher on the SurveyMonkey website.

An adjustment on the open-ended questionnaire was made in order to accommodate some aspects of the original open-ended questionnaire– this was done in light of making the open-ended questionnaire more compatible for online application. The

major area of adjustment included Section B (information on experience in the area of HR), where the table was adjusted to include drop-down selection lists for respondents. These adjustments gave respondents the option of selecting from a drop-down list that depicted the following:

- The Turnover/Balance Sheets Total
- HR Experience in years
- Industry/Sector sections.

The address list was based on the list of companies in different sectors that employ HR graduates and professionals. Each respondent was given a number as reference – to ensure the open-ended questionnaire could be sent to alternative email addresses, should the respondent have difficulty opening the link, and to remove respondents from the reminder email address list should they choose not to participate. The questionnaire link was sent to recipients on the address list. During the administration of the open-ended questionnaire, several additions were made based on company suggestions. The total number of respondents included in the address list was 1 394. The open-ended questionnaire link was opened on 21 May 2013 and closed on 24 June 2013 at 00:00 (collection period = four weeks).

#### **4.2.5 Rationale for data collection on HR competencies**

The research design for this study sought to structure the research and provide an exposition on how all components of the research project – including the sample and methods – link, in order to address the fundamental research questions.

The world of work is rapidly changing as the nature of our world has evolved from an industrial base through services to an information society. Thus our workplaces, work practices and production processes are constantly changing. As an important building block in an organisation, human resource management (HRM) must be prepared to deal with the effects of the changing world of work. For those working in HR, it means

understanding the implications of aspects like globalisation, work-force diversity, corporate down-sizing, continuous improvement initiatives, re-engineering, the contingent work force, decentralised work sites, employee involvement, and changing skills requirements. The emphasis of the study is on investigating skills requirements. As illustrated under the methods of data collection, the instruments used made it possible for the study to get a sense of what the labour market needs from HR professionals. In this case, HR Competency Models were also useful – as they provided a comprehensive background on HR competencies required by the world of work.

#### **4.3. SAMPLING**

According to Strydom and Venter (2001:197), a sample is defined as “the elements of a population considered for actual inclusion in a study”. In this study, a sample is studied, in an attempt to understand the population from which it was drawn. In qualitative studies, non-probability samples are used almost without exception (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom Duan and Hoagwood, 2013). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, purposeful sampling is used – with the intention of gathering and identifying information and thereby selecting information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon under study. Purposive sampling in qualitative inquiry is the deliberate seeking of participants with particular characteristics according to the needs of the developing analysis and emerging theory (Merriam, 2009). In essence, this implies that the study involved choosing participants whose experience and perspectives were deemed to be important in the investigation.

The rationale for the use of purposeful selection of participants was the potential it has to group participants according to the set criteria relevant to a particular research question and for information selection (Tongco, 2007). Tongco (2007) stated that purposeful sampling is useful in qualitative research as it is a technique that allows for deliberate choice of informant due to the qualities the informant possess that are perceived useful in a study. Furthermore, Brown (2006) declared that a study can be started with a survey, and in turn purposive sampling be done based on the survey.

Purposeful sampling was applied when HR employers were chosen purposefully from various organisations and the open-ended questionnaire distributed purposefully to companies that recently employed HR graduates and professionals in a period that did not exceed five years. Patton (2015) states that purposeful sampling does not necessarily require a large sample, as the sample results could be used to avoid controversy around potential selection bias (Patton, 2015: 286). Patton (2015) further confirmed that purposeful sampling strategy does add credibility – even if the randomly chosen sample is larger than what the researcher can handle.

In applying the purposive sampling as a strategy for HR data collection, the researcher aimed to obtain sample that appeared to be representative of the population with specific focus on gathering HR data from the world of work in terms of requisite HR requirements.

#### **4.4. DATA ANALYSIS**

In qualitative research, the analysis of data involves the intent to uncover and understand the holistic picture. Schwandt (2007:7) purports that the data analysis process is about gathering fragmented pieces of information or components – in order to construct a meaningful whole. Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2012) aver that data analysis eventually leads the researcher to be able to describe the phenomenon under investigation, and to gain an understanding through the data collected. The data analysis is essential for the interpretation of the phenomenon under study – based on the premise of deducing meaning from and also understanding a situation.

According to De Vos (2002:341), a qualitative data analysis process starts when the data collection process begins. The analysis process proceeds to the next phase when a continual, fine-tuning procedure takes place. The researcher carries out this procedure to produce the most ‘fertile’ set of data. The researcher has to plan carefully for this during the data collection process (both for the document analysis and the data collected by the open-ended questionnaire). This is in order to keep the data intact,

carefully arranged and organised, complete, and accessible (*cf.* De Vos, 2002:340). Marshall and Rossman (1995:1113) emphasised the importance of reading the collected data several times before starting with the analysis, and this was adhered to in this study. This was followed by the identification of themes, and thereafter categories started to emerge. Creswell (1998:114) refers to this as taking the “information apart and looking for categories, themes or dimensions” (*cf.* De Vos, 2002:344).

#### **4.5. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF RESEARCH**

The value of any research needs to be addressed. Qualitative research – differing from quantitative research in nature and purpose – requires unique assessment criteria. De Vos (2002:351-2, Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers to four aspects that relates to trustworthiness or criteria for qualitative studies. These aspects, which helps to render scientifically acceptable are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

In this study, multiple methods of data collection were applied in an attempt to arrive at a scientifically acceptable finding and conclusion. The methods referred to – document analysis, literature search/review as well as the open-ended questionnaire – served to reinforce the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings of the study. The findings, after the synthesis of six HR competency models discussed in Chapter three, also added significant credibility and trustworthiness to the preliminary findings of the study. The researcher used the synthesis results and the results from the two sets of data collected during the empirical study, to argue the need to adapt the HR curriculum to ensure the relevance of the curriculum for contemporary organisations and the world of work.

The researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the results of the data collection process and findings, through application of multiple methods of data collection. Initially, an in-depth analysis of HR competencies in various HR competency models

was conducted. This process identified HR competencies that authors of the HR models had pointed out as being crucial. In the synthesis process, HR competencies were identified through the frequent appearance of certain competencies in all the consulted HR models.

#### **4.5.1. Credibility (internal validity)**

Credibility as one of the criteria that ensures trustworthiness and quality of research, was applied in the study. In order to ensure that data collected is credible, the study had to apply, recognised research methods such as literature review, document analysis as well open-ended questionnaire to collect and analysed the data that formed HR requirements. This also refers to the triangulation concept that was applied (4.6). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) declared, credibility emphasise the applicability of methods and data in other context and further ensure findings can be generalised from the sample to the larger population.

#### **4.5.2. Transferability**

The rigour in which the search for HR qualities was done via appropriate methods, using trusted sources of data as well as relying on background data to establish context. The transferability concept was also applied when detailed description of phenomenon under study, namely ensuring that sufficient detail on HR requirements that illustrate the needs of the world of work. This was done to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to suit other settings, situations and people.

#### **4.5.3. Dependability (reliability)**

Dependability of a qualitative study is defined as a data collection method used in the study to ensure consistency during the conceptualisation of the study (Merriam, 1998:205). This would include the processes of collecting the data, interpreting and generating the findings and reporting the results. In addition, the logic followed to select the sample for investigation, should be clearly presented. The more consistency there is in the study, the more dependable the results will be (Merriam, 1998:205).

In this study, dependability refers to the stability of findings over time. The data collection process started with the document data collection, based on a comprehensive search of HR vacancy websites. In order for the researcher to find the required HR competencies, a search for specific advertisements with positions that essentially needed HR professionals, was launched. In order to strengthen dependability by means of the data collected, another set of HR data was collected via the open-ended questionnaire that was meant to ensure that the study could rely on rich data prior with the ultimate aim of ensuring the stability findings over time (Bitsch, 2005). The latter process was necessary to be followed prior findings and conclusions.

#### **4.5.4. Confirmability (objectivity)**

Confirmability as another criterion for trustworthiness of the study was realised in a variety of ways such as the in-depth methodological descriptions that allow integrity of results to be scrutinised, In addition, to confirm confirmability of the study results, triangulation of results was done. The study further ensured that sufficient data from the labour market sufficiently support the findings, interpretations and conclusions reached in chapter six.

#### **4.6. TRIANGULATION**

According to Mouton and Marais (1990), the concept of triangulation in the study refers to application of multiple data collection methods in the study. Furthermore, Holloway and Wheeler: 2002) posits that ‘triangulation has been identified as one way of helping to obtain rigour in qualitative research studies. The term refers to the use of more than one method of data collection and can involve triangulation of data, investigators and theories’. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:31) refers to the triangulation concept as ‘the use of multi-method strategies to collect data and permits triangulation and increases the credibility of the result’. In describing the advantage of the triangulation concept in qualitative inquiry, Babbie and Mouton (2001:275) averred that triangulation: “another advantage of designing multi-method research lies in the potential for enhancement of the validity of the study findings”. This implies that the research can gain much more confidence in the validity of findings, since they are

supported by multiple sources of data-gathering methods that complement various types of data.

In an attempt to validate the findings of the study, the researcher had to apply various methods of data collection – with the purpose of satisfying the triangulation concept. This was to construct increased reliability of observation for analysis purposes.

In Bogdan and Biklen (2006), and De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2002:365), triangulation in the social sciences is referred to as a concept that is often used to indicate that more than two methods are applied in a study – with a view to building credibility of the research results. The application of triangulation in this study was achieved through cross-checking the HR requirements' data by document analysis and narrative inquiry – as well as the synthesis of six HR competency models that were scrutinised for relevance of HR knowledge, skills and competencies required by the employer community. The findings derived through the application of different data collection methods – and especially across different situations and periods – suffice to confirm the triangulation concept. The study findings are based on the HR employers' perceptions about requisite competencies needed in the job market. The triangulation concept is deemed relevant, in the sense that the study employed a variety of data derived from the document analysis, literature analysis and synthesis of HR competency models as well as open-ended questionnaire– to derive a set of HR knowledge and theory, competencies, skills, attributes and characteristics relevant in the job market. The researcher therefore believes that the findings of the study are reliable, given that triangulation was used to prove the reliability of the data collection methods (*cf.* Potter, 1996). Bogdan and Biklen (2006) assert that triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross-verification from more than two sources – that increases the reliability and trustworthiness of results. Furthermore, Creswell (2005:600) avers that triangulation also refers to the combination of quantitative and qualitative data that can be merged to best understand the phenomenon under study.

In addition, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007:239) described the concept of triangulation as inclusiveness of multiple methods – to gather data and verify evidence. As a result, this concept in research is meant to satisfy the question of whether the research would yield the same results if the process were replicated with the same or similar participants, and in a similar context. The researcher addressed the issue of reliability by using techniques to show that, if the work were repeated in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants – similar results would be obtained (*cf.* Loh, 2013).

#### **4.7. DATA SATURATION IN THE STUDY**

In addition to the use of triangulation concept in the study, the researcher applied the theoretical saturation concept. Theoretical saturation in the study was achieved when the classification of information from the data collection process did not yield any new information on the required knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes in HR. The theoretical saturation concept allowed the researcher to indicate how and when the decision was reached, and that there was sufficient depth of information and redundancy of data to meet the purposes of the study. The sampling process should be flexible, evolving as the study progresses – until the point of redundancy in emerging themes is reached (*cf.* Patton: 300). Furthermore, in ensuring the validity in the study, saturation was used, which according to Padgett (2008: 171) is ‘the point at which no additional data collection is needed, no new are developed, and themes and subthemes have been fully fleshed out’. In addition, Mason (2010) states that in qualitative research, the saturation point is reached when the collection of data reaches a stage when no new information is yielded – a point of diminishing return for a qualitative sample. Comprehensive understanding on requisite HR competences was achieved by the continuation of sampling or data gathering, to the extent that no new substantive information presented.

The collection of data by multiple modes of data collection also brought the findings of the study to a point of theoretical saturation – to substantiate the trustworthiness and validity of the study findings. The attempt to remain faithful to the principles of

qualitative research, triangulation, theoretical saturation, and dependability of data on HR requirements collected from HR advertisements, resulted in having a large sample size – in order to conform to specific requirements of the concepts applied during the data analysis processes. The concept of theoretical saturation in the study, implied the continual collection of new data up to a stage where no newer information was yielded on HR competencies required by the job market. The theoretical saturation point was reached when it became apparent that the data collection instruments applied could not generate any new information – but rather repeatedly yielded the same results. As confirmed by Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003), theoretical saturation in this study was realised where constant diminishing of new information in terms of the qualitative results on relevant information on HR requirements, became apparent. As the process of data collection continued, it did not yield any new information. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) explain theoretical saturation as:

*A point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample – as the study goes on more data do not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework.*

#### **4.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As with any research study, especially where people are involved, it was imperative to pay careful attention to relevant ethical considerations. Orb (2001) asserts that 'ethics pertain to doing well and avoiding harm'. The rights of respondents in this study were held in high regard and imposition was avoided right through the study. Ethical principles such as ensuring anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent of all respondents were all applied. Roth (2005) also stresses that ethical consideration in every qualitative research is crucial and should be adhered to in all studies. In this study, ethics were a cornerstone for conducting effective and meaningful research (*cf.* Best & Kahn, 2006). HR professionals and graduates were part of the study, and some important information needed to be drawn from them; therefore, they also had to be dealt with according to basic ethical principles.

In attempting to respond to ethical considerations for the successful completion of the current study, the researcher had to consider a number of factors. The most important aspect for the researcher was to ensure full responsibility to protect all the participants in an investigation. The following measures were taken to comply with the requirements of ethical principles in the study:

- ***Consent***

Consent in this study involved the procedure by which all individuals voluntarily chose whether or not to participate in the study. To ensure that participants gave informed consent, the researcher ensured that they had a complete understanding of the purpose and methods to be used in the study, the risks involved, and the demands that would be made of them as participants (*cf.* Best & Kahn, 2006; Jones & Kottler, 2006). The participants had also been informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time, that they would remain anonymous, and that the data would be dealt with confidentially. The fact that they participated indicated their consent.

- ***Information***

The researcher ensured that information was communicated to participants in an effective manner. This implied that the researcher had to respond to the question as to what information was given, and how it was presented to participants. The information regarding the details of the questions posed to the participants, had to be planned and presented so that it could be completely understood. The researcher had to take full responsibility to see to it that this was accomplished. This placed a great responsibility on the researcher.

- ***Ethics Committee***

This study was approved by the UFS Ethics Committee. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the integrity of the University of the Free State. In the first place, it is the function of the Ethics Committee to ensure that all research in the Faculty that utilises human participants and/or informants, is bound by specific ethical principles. The underlying rationale is to preserve and respect the rights, freedoms and wellbeing of all people involved in the research project. Therefore, the Ethics Committee acts to protect the community from where the human research respondents are selected. The

Ethics Committee serves as a go-between in this network of people, in order, where necessary, to exercise impartial adjudication of the execution of research.

#### **4.9. CONCLUSION**

This chapter was written to explain, qualify and justify the methodology used in the study. Based on the information gained from the literature review and the document analysis, the researcher could compile a research instrument – the questionnaire – to use the data collection process. This was to collect information on the views and perspectives of a group of informed participants who had knowledge of, and a particular interest in, the topic under study. During the research process, attention was constantly given to ensuring the trustworthiness of the methodology - to ensure trustworthy findings. Acting ethically throughout was a priority.

Data analysis was a two-fold process. It started during data collection, and thus ensured triangulation as a mixed-method approach was used. It was concluded with the second step of organising the data into final categories and themes.

# **Chapter Five**

## ***Presentation, analysis and interpretation of data***

### **5.1. Introduction**

Chapter four of the study focused on the description and relevance of the methodology and research design, as well as the methods and techniques employed in the data-collection process. In this chapter, the data will be presented, analysed and interpreted. The data were collected and analysed in response to the problem statement in chapter one. This chapter will provide the basis for the discussion of the main findings in chapter six. The data analysis process put more emphasis on eliciting the requisite HR qualities that the labour market perceives as being fundamental. This entailed an attempt to extract the fundamental HR qualities that were later classified under three clusters, namely theoretical knowledge, technical competencies and skills sets as well as attributes – that the world of work perceives as being vital in the execution of work for HR professionals.

Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, Chadwick (2008) maintained that the theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research, In constructing the themes mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, the study identified repetitive words that emerged from sets of data on HR qualities that were also used as clues that led to the coding of text. In qualitative research various approaches for the collection and analysis of data aims to provide an in-depth, socio-contextual and detailed description and interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016).

The coding started with the linking of data to the research question and consolidation of raw data on HR requirements. The process of identifying patterns in the data was followed by integrating patterns and processing of relevant information in the text and the interpretation followed. The coding process was mainly about the selection of distinct concepts and categories in the data, which formed the basic units of analysis. The words or phrases that were consistently mentioned in the HR data as main

requirements were highlighted and grouped together to form main themes and other related types of HR data were classified or categorised as sub-themes.

To this end, the emergence of the three main themes came about as a result of an in-depth analysis of data from the document analysis and open-ended questionnaire that served as data collection methods. Therefore, the coding process involved the identification of words that exemplified the same theoretical and the descriptive idea (Gibbs, 2007). The data on HR qualities that had a similar meaning were clustered and linked with the name – the main theme of HR competency. Several identical text and/ or words were clustered together, coded to the same main theme, and ultimately led to a domain of HR competency.

The purpose of the study was to find out, through scientifically proven and accepted methods and instruments, which HR qualities, skills and behaviours the labour market expects an HR graduate and professional to display in the world of work. This informed and guided the study in terms of the implications these perceptions of HR qualities for the labour market, hold for programme and curriculum planning at HEIs. According to Itika (2011), the emphasis on the field of HR as a discipline and practice charged with the responsibility to manage the human capital of an organisation, has increased tremendously in recent decades. This trend is similar to the evolution of management practices and other related functions such as finance, marketing and communications – to name a few (Business Matter, 2013; Thenmozhi, n.d).

The following section presents an analysis of the data from the literature review, the content analysis (job advertisements), and the open-ended questionnaire. The data collected on HR requirements were thus processed in order to arrange the information in a manner that allowed classification. This process rendered three main sets of information. First are HR qualities that are theoretical in nature and these were categorised as theoretical knowledge. The second taxonomy of data was HR job requirements that are technical, hard-core, and are a necessity for the execution of an HR job. These are specialised in nature – and this set of requirements can only be acquired through professional training. The last classification of HR job requirements was the general attributes that every HR graduate and professional are expected to possess for the successful execution of their specific assigned tasks. Subsequent to

this, a thorough processing of the HR requirements, as they appeared in the job advertisements, provided a sense of the most wanted HR requirements that the job market identified as being essential in the execution of tasks.

The researcher arranged the HR requirements' data into meaningful, logical and manageable categories – with the purpose of identifying clear and condensed HR requirements that could be considered in compiling or reviewing a teaching and learning programme for HR graduates. In the classification of HR requirements process, three crucial and relevant themes of HR-specific job requirements emerged. These themes emerged as a result of HR requirements that became apparently related to each theme. The HR themes identified as being predominantly related to the needs of the world of work are:

- Theoretical knowledge
- Technical competencies and skills sets
- Attributes.

The collected data that were clustered in the aforesaid main themes were perceived to be the most sought-after by the world of work.

## **5.2. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

Qualitative data were collected by document analysis of documents, and through administration of questionnaires to the labour market.

In this study, the researcher applied a literature search or review, document analysis and an open-ended questionnaire – as research tools to gather data on HR qualities needed by the world of work. The data gathered would determine the requisite HR qualities that the labour market perceived as being integral in the execution of the duties of HR professionals, and reveal the latest trends in the development of the HR field. The results of the data analysis would finally indicate which HR qualities needed to be considered for inclusion in HR programmes and curricula.

### **5.2.1. Document analysis**

Bowen (2009) posits that document analysis refers to 'a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based or Internet-transmitted) material'. Corbin and Strauss (2008) avers that as it is the case with other analytical method in qualitative research, document analysis also requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to deduce meaning, get understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. The document can be analysed at two levels: (i) a basic level, which provides a descriptive account of the data – what was said, but with no comments or theories as to why or how; and (ii) the latent level of analysis, which entails a more interpretivism analysis concerned with the response and what may have been inferred or implied.

In the study, an endeavour was made to apply the latent level of analysis with the sole aim of arriving at a more interpretivism analysis – which is mainly concerned with what was mentioned in the responses – but also with the aim of understanding what might have been inferred by the responses.

### **5.2.2. Data analysis process**

The researcher's aim in the document analysis process was to determine the key requirements of HR jobs on the basis of job advertisements. The researcher scrutinised advertisements to determine what the employer community needs from newly appointed HR practitioners. This was done to determine the HR theory and knowledge, requisite skills – as well as characteristics and attributes required by the world of work.

Given the wide-ranging set of data identified through the website search of HR vacancies, clustering of information for categorisation and management, to promote better understanding, became essential. The data clustering involved the data being grouped into categories or fields identified from the raw data – resulting in the formulation of clusters of competencies that formed a model or framework that captured the key competencies perceived to be important by the world of work. This clustering of data according to specific classifications, came about as a means to

determine which competencies were frequently identified as imperative in helping HR graduates and professionals become competent in their specific roles. The website search exposed the researcher to data that provided ample evidence of the theoretical knowledge, technical skills, competencies and general attributes that were frequently required for the advertised HR jobs.

#### **5.2.2.1. Steps followed in analysing documents**

The steps that were undertaken in the data analysis process are briefly mentioned below. The document analysis concepts of Love (2013) were used as a guideline in the application of the document analysis process.

1. The researcher had to determine what type of document need to be analysed, and for the purpose of the study HR job advertisements had to be considered in order to get the relevant data for the study.
2. In considering the specific document to be analysed, the study had to ensure the rationale as to why was it created- to ascertain that the document was created in order to publish HR jobs in line with the needs of the world of work.
3. Evaluate whether the information in the document is primary or secondary. Primary provides the researcher with the original materials on which other research is based. This enable researchers to get as close as possible to the original idea on what actually happened during a particular event or time period. Published materials can be viewed as primary resources if they were written or produced by someone with first-hand experience of the event. While on the other hand secondary source is generally one or more steps removed from the event or time period and are normally rewritten or reproduced in a slightly different format from the original or primary idea.
4. Determine who authored the document, and who may have contributed information, and in this case documents were authored by the labour market.
5. Consider the era in which the document was created. In this instance periods of data collection were crucial as this would lead to consistency of requirements for the HR jobs.

6. Compare the document to others of the same type from the same location and area. Various websites were used to ensure consistency of familiar job requirements.
7. The study had to ensure whether the document is an original by engaging administrators of websites to ask for clarity of some requirements.
8. The researcher had to familiarise with the sources of documents that were extracted from various job websites and to determine the most useful and relevant source of data.

In addition to the steps outlined above (*cf* 5.2.2.1.), the study aligned the process to the document analysis in the research of Love (2013). Love (2013) referred to document analysis as been determined by concepts such as cataloguing, determining context and assessing authenticity. Further to the steps indicated above, the categorisation of information from job advertisements were done and categories that were could be linked were listed as major categories. Once all transcripts of data on HR job requirements, namely categories or themes were categorised, they were reviewed to ensure that the information was categorised as it should be. Lastly, all the categories were reviewed once again to ascertain whether some categories could be merged or if some needed to be sub-categorised.

The process of the document analysis was lengthy, and required the researcher to go over and over the data to ensure that a thorough analysis of job advertisements had been done on about 850 specific job requirements and responsibilities. Thus, the document analysis process presents the analysed and interpreted data from 52 job advertisements. The results are presented as themes, categories and subcategories – supplemented by literature to verify the results.

The study identified three main domains of HR competencies with underpinning sub-factors of competencies, namely theoretical knowledge, competencies and skills sets, as well as attributes required for performing the HR function. As the traditional role of HR was mainly about performing transactional tasks, more qualities and knowledge are required for higher-level performance of HR professionals, and this involves strategic HR management that underpins organisational strategic goals and the mission and vision – as part of seeing the bigger picture. Achieving competency in

these areas is essential for the individual's professional progression – particularly the development of competencies associated with leadership roles. As previously indicated, the intense research done on competencies needed by the world of work, has led to the emergence of many HR competency models. These include the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) at RBL (Brockbank *et al.*, 2012), the US Government Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Human Resources Competency Model 3. All these HR models were an attempt to get to the bottom of determining the requisite competencies that will help make the HR profession become recognised, and also earn it respect when the strategic initiative discussions take place. Some studies have shown that HR is seen as not fulfilling the role of driving the strategic contribution in organisations, (Giunta, 2006:31). Roberts (2003) avers that HR does not have the required skill and tact to create the strategy that impacts on organisations' performance. Furthermore, Ulrich, Roberts, Kossek and Ozeki (1998) argued HR was not effective and was also not successful in creating value as expected by organisations.

In an attempt to gather sufficient information on the requisite HR qualities that are perceived to be fundamental for HR professionals in the labour market, it became imperative for the study to probe further into the perceptions of the labour market about the requisite HR requirements that were depicted in job advertisements. This exercise would enable the study to identify the inherent requirements in terms of what the labour market perceives as being fundamental when they search for competent HR professionals for their organisations. The data collected through the questionnaire supplemented the data collected during the document analysis process. The data collected via the document analysis from 52 HR job advertisements and the open-ended questionnaire sent to 1 393 HR employers, is discussed below.

### 5.2.3. Data analysis of HR job advertisements

Tables 5.1 to 5.7 (below) present data on advertisements according to a variety of variables.

**Table 5.1: Advertisements collected according to industry**

Industry	Total Advertisements
Construction	8
Hospitality	2
Mining and Petroleum	22
Corporate (Finance, Insurance, Recruitment, Training and Development)	10
Engineering	6
FMCG and Manufacturing and Textiles/Clothing	4

Table 5.1 above displayed various sectors from where the HR data were drawn. The emphasis is placed on ensuring the understanding that HRM, as the management of work and people in organisations, is a critical function that impacts on all sectors of the economy. This implied that the role of HR professionals is concerned with people development alike right across all sectors. Furthermore, various sectors depicted on Table 5.1 are indicative of the fact that HR professionals have the opportunity to become central to the effectiveness not only in a specific single sector but also have an impact on each and every economic environment where there is a human element.

**Table 5.2: Advertisements collected according to province**

Province	Total Advertisements
Gauteng	22
Free State	2
Mpumalanga	4
Western Cape	8
Northern Cape	3
Limpopo	7

North West	2
Eastern Cape	1
KwaZulu-Natal	3

Table 5.2 above displays the widespread contribution of participants from all provinces of the Republic of South Africa. This shows the premium placed on the role of HR that cuts across all regions and most probably in all the formal sectors of the economy that includes the public sector, and in organisations. The significance of HR and its role in organisations therefore need to be seen in light of its recognition in organisations regardless of a specific geographical location as the work of HR interacts and impact considerably with people employed in all formal sectors of the economy. As evidence by the data collected in chapter four, much modern HR work has to do with sophisticated HR practices aimed at engaging knowledge workers in order to drive organisational success in a modern, global business world alike.

**Table 5.3: Advertisements collected according to focus areas**

Focus Area	Total Advertisements
Employee Relations	15
Human Resources	31
HR Recruiting	2
Training and Development	4

The focus on the relevance and the need of HR function in various focus area is pertinent given the data that displayed the requirements on components of work related to HR. Table 5.3 seeks to expose the most relevant need of a specific focus of area which the world of work currently deem as crucial. As indicated in the literature chapter, the world of HR has changed dramatically in the past two to three decades. HR is no longer regarded as the administrators making sure employees have what they need. It is apparent from the modern literature that HR needs to fulfil the role of informative and strategic business partners that work with management to shape the organization and prepare human capital for the ever changing operations of business. As a result, Table 5.3 displays precisely the very fact that the role of HR has expanded

way beyond the obsolete administrative function. The core function of HR has clearly developed to other focus areas that need to add value to organisations' existence and its competition status in the labour market.

**Table 5.4: Advertisements collected according to contract**

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Total Advertisements</b>
Permanent	49
Temporary	1
Semi-Permanent	1
6 months	1

According to Table 5.4 the most number of HR respondents were those who are permanently employed in their organisations. The temporary, semi-permanent and those with 6 months' contracts contributed poorly to the open-ended questionnaire.

#### **5.2.4. Coding of data collected via document analysis**

The data collected – as displayed in tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 – was an attempt to apply the qualitative mode of data analysis, with the aim of distinguishing, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting data that would lead to meaningful patterns of category sets of related HR qualities. As the study followed the data processing technique of Corbin and Strauss (2008), the qualitative coding process entailed an analytical categorising of data referred to above – in order to convert it into an understandable and meaningful form. Therefore, the coding process involved the identification of words that exemplified the same theoretical and the descriptive idea (Gibbs, 2007). The data on HR qualities that had a similar meaning were clustered and linked with the name – the main domain of HR competency. Several identical text and/ or words were clustered together, coded to the same main theme, and ultimately a domain of HR competency emerged.

The content data collected were thus analysed using the coding process explained above, and three main sets of required HR qualities emerged. These were competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes, that would all assist an HR

graduate and professional to be effective and efficient in executing his/ her work. The categorisation of the data referred to is explicitly displayed in tables 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 below.

#### **5.2.4.1. Data reduction**

The data reduction in the study had to do with the organisation of HR data from the labour market that was reduced and reconfigured in order to arrive at a more meaningful and manageable set of information – that would help the study to form specific sets of required HR qualities for graduates and professionals in the field of HR. As the data reduction process forced choices about sets of HR qualities, the aim was to arrive at the core of what should be regarded as the best set of HR qualities that the study should suggest as requisite knowledge and competencies. To arrive at the latter, the first five steps of the data analysis procedure described in 5.2.2, were followed. The data collected were organised and narrowed to a point where they could be converted into meaningful interpretation. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to this stage of data collection in qualitative data analysis as data reduction. Silverman (2010:283) state that data reduction “... refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions”. This process not only concentrated on condensing and managing data, but was also a mechanism meant to probe deeper – to make clear the realisation of issues targeted by the study: knowledge and skills, competencies and attributes required for HRMs.

#### **5.2.4.2. Data management**

Data management in this study is understood to be an integral and vital exercise that is geared towards enabling the analysis and interpretation of data – with the ultimate goal of making meaning of it (*cf.* Johnson, Dunlap & Benoit, 2010). The principle of selectivity in qualitative analysis in this study, in the first place, was based on the premise that the data on HR qualities gathered via document analysis, had to be carefully categorised by coding. The categorisation of data was arranged in order to be able to respond to the first research question posed in the study: What are the expectations of the labour market in terms of the readiness of HR graduates in the world of work globally and nationally?

First, the adverts for positions as HR professionals, indicating the attributes required by the organisations of prospective HR employees – were selected and copied and/or printed. Brief notes were made in the margins of the copies to identify relevant information. These were read carefully and preliminary categories were identified. These preliminary categories were entered into a spreadsheet programme and categorised according to various descriptions of job requirements. Similar categories were put together under the same heading. This process enabled the study to come up with competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes. Analysing the data went beyond enumerating a list of requirements, and also probed the relative importance assigned to the requirements. Apart from exploring the specific content of the advertisements (which represented the respondents' views), note was also taken of the relative frequency with which different requirements were mooted – as well as the number of times they appeared in advertisements.

In each category, as indicated in the previous section, there were also sub-factors of qualities, and these are reflected in tables 5.5 to 5.7 below. In the Job Classification Procedure (UT Institute of Agriculture, n.d.) which concentrated on job classification of skills for positions, the HR division declared:

*The basic procedure is to compare the job content of each job in relation to one another by determining the amount of skill, effort, and responsibilities that is inherent within each job.*

The coding process proved to be a useful mechanism for determining the required information that led to the HR qualities displayed in tables 5.5 to 5.7.

### **5.3. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS BASED ON JOB ADVERTISEMENTS**

The coding process in qualitative document analysis informed the categorisation of data into three main HR themes: *theoretical knowledge, competencies and skills, as well as attributes*. The HR qualities that emerged from the document analysis process, are discussed below.

### 5.3.1. Theoretical knowledge, as a required quality for HR professionals

The categorisation of data that formed theoretical knowledge, involved sub-factors that were categorised in table 5.5 (below). This is not about technical expertise in HR. The data on theoretical knowledge was found to be related to mainly the behavioural aspects of HR. The theoretical aspects facilitate the acquiring of the knowledge required by capable people, in order to demonstrate and apply competencies to systems supporting human resource management practices.

The theoretical aspects that were regarded as imperative in the data gathered from the advertisements, are tabulated in Table 5.5 (below).

**Table 5.5: Theoretical aspects required in HR professionals, as identified by the job market**

Theoretical Knowledge	
Fundamental qualities under Theoretical Knowledge	Theory/Knowledge (Sub-factors)
<i>Management Theory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administration</li> <li>Business management</li> <li>Business partnerships</li> <li>Conflict management</li> <li>Mentorship</li> <li>People management</li> </ul>
<i>Fundamental Knowledge</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business communication</li> <li>Business skills</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Numerical skills</li> <li>Finance</li> </ul>

<i>Literacy</i>	Computer literacy Computer skills IT (Information Technology) Language literacy Language proficiency Language skills Writing skills
<i>Ethics</i>	Ethics
<i>Labour Legislation</i>	Finance law Labour law Legal expertise Legal framework Legislative framework
<i>HR Theory</i>	Application of HR principles and premises Leadership Performance management Skills development Talent management
<i>Policy</i>	Policy analysis Policy development Policy implementation
<i>Project Management</i>	Project management
<i>Change Management</i>	Change management Transformation

Human resource management clearly needs to be developed to facilitate the learning of certain skills and knowledge required by the world of work. This means HR professionals need to be developed and trained to acquire sound theoretical knowledge - as displayed in Table 5.5 (above). This has been cited by the labour market as being useful and fundamental in terms of enhancing the capability of HR professionals in the application of human resource management practices that support organisational performance. As with various developed and developing countries, for South African organisations to continue to grow and to remain globally competitive, it is crucial to support the acquisition of theoretical knowledge – as it enhances the

behavioural aspect of HR professionals. Under theoretical knowledge, the fundamental qualities depicted were: Management Theory, Fundamental Knowledge, Literacy, Ethics, Labour Legislation, HR Theory, Policy, Project Management, and Change Management.

The theory to be learned in all the aspects indicated in the table above, is perceived to be indicative of which job requirements – as found in HR advertisements – are relevant to equip HR professionals in the execution of their duties. These HR requirements are further regarded as being enabling in the execution of HR work.

### **5.3.2. HR competencies and skills required by the labour market**

Soutter (2013:2) described competencies as “requirements for positions in an attempt to improve human performance”. Furthermore, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (n.d.) present the competency concept as “a combination of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes that contribute to enhance employee performance and ultimate organisational success...”. In view of the definitions provided above, the study will use the competency concept aligned with this meaning.

Thus the categorisation of data on competencies and skills sets, was based on HR technical expertise that underpins theoretical knowledge in the execution of an HR job. This set of HR competencies forms part of crucial requirements that are acquired through professional training (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich (2012). The HR competencies referred to in this study were determined and selected by identifying HR characteristics that are practical in nature, rather than mere theory, and yet are firmly based on theory. These HR competencies are perceived to be characteristic of skills that enable HR professionals to achieve results – thereby creating value in an organisation. In support of the latter assertion, the Centre for Organisational Effectiveness (2012: Online) avers that:

*Therefore, organisations must understand their core competency needs – the skills, knowledge, behaviours, and abilities that are necessary for people in key roles to deliver business results.*

The HR requirements under the competencies and skills sets category – as depicted in table 5.6 below – are perceived to be integral to and fundamental for the world of work. Therefore, the distinction between the theoretical and the practical requirements in tables 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7, is that the theoretical knowledge element focuses mainly on academic theory, while core competencies and skills sets focus on practical application as required by the world of work. The study attempted to distinguish between the concepts in Table 5.6 (below).

Table 5.6 further depicted theoretical knowledge theory, competencies and skills sets as HR qualities required by HR employers in the job market.

**Table 5.6: Theoretical knowledge linked to HR competencies and skills sets required by the labour market.**

<b>Main HR Qualities (Relevant to HR Professionals/Graduates)</b>	<b>Theory/Knowledge</b>	<b>Competencies &amp; Skills set</b>
<b>Management Theory</b>	HR Administration Business Management Business Partnerships Conflict Management Mentorship People Management	Analysis & synthesis of information
<b>Labour Legislation</b>	Finance Law Labour Law Legal Expertise Legal Framework	
<b>HR Theory</b>	HR Theories	Decision making
<b>Leadership</b>	Leadership	
<b>Performance Management</b>	Performance Management	Management skills

<b>Policy</b>	Policy Analysis Policy Development Policy Implementation	Multi-tasking Time management
<b>Fundamental Knowledge</b>	Project Management Change Management Transformation	Problem solving
	Business Communication Business Skills Communication Ethics Numerical Skills Finance Skills Development Talent Management	Team work
<b>Literacy</b>	Computer Literacy Computer Skills Information Technology Language Literacy Language Proficiency Language Skills Writing Skills	

The HR requirements depicted in table 5.6 are regarded as fundamental, as they are seen as core in HRM. The labour market needs these HR competencies and skills sets depicted in Table 5.6 above. This could be considered for improvement of the academic content in the field of HRM. The document analysis process seems to implicitly suggest that the HRM role must cover the application of the qualities indicated under the main classifications of HR requirements by the HR job market and the world of work. The categorised information and major functional specialisations need to be applied in an integrated manner.

### 5.3.3. Attributes and characteristics relevant to the HR profession

The classification of HR job requirements in Table 5.7 (below) comprised the general attributes that all HR graduates and professionals are expected to display in the execution of their specific, assigned tasks. In addition, Table 5.7 depicts HR qualities that form the basis for attributes and characteristics that the world of work recommends for any competent human resource professional (see category 3 in Table 5.7). The attributes and characteristics are not always taught in a programme, but are regarded as fundamental for a professional to have, in order to execute tasks and duties successfully. A training programme must therefore be structured to enable the development of these essential attributes.

**Table 5.7: Integration of theory/knowledge, competencies and skills sets and attributes relevant for HR professionals, as identified by the job market**

Main HR Qualities (Relevant to HR Professionals/Graduates)	Theory/Knowledge	Competencies & Skills Set	Attributes		
<b>Management Theory</b>	Administration				
	Business Management				
	Business Partnerships				
	Conflict Management				
	Mentorship			Ability to mentor	
	Management			People Management	People Skills
					Capable of relationship building
<b>Fundamental Knowledge</b>	Business Communication				
	Business Skills				
	Communication			Communication	
	Numerical Skills				
	Finance				
	Skills Development				

	Talent Management		
<b>Core Competencies</b>		Analytical Skills	
			Communication
		Decision-making Skills	Good working relations
			Honesty
			Interpersonal Skills
		Management Skills	Intuition
		Multi-tasking Abilities	Creativity
		Problem Solving	Openness
		Team Work	Ability to work with others
		Time Management	
<b>Literacy</b>	Computer Literacy		
	Computer Skills		
	Information Technology		
	Language Literacy		
	Language Proficiency		
	Language Skills		
	Writing Skills		
<b>Strategic Function</b>			Diligence
			Confidentiality
			High morals
<b>Ethics</b>	Ethics		
<b>Labour Legislation</b>	Finance Law		
	Labour Law		
	Legal Expertise		
	Legal Framework		
	Legislative Framework		
<b>HR Theory</b>	HR Theory		
<b>Leadership</b>	Leadership		
<b>Performance Management</b>	Performance Management		

<b>Policy</b>	Policy Analysis		
	Policy Development		
	Policy Implementation		
<b>Project Management</b>	Project Management		
<b>Change Management</b>	Transformation	Strategic Planning/Thinking	Commitment
			Confidence
			Strategic Thinking

The theoretical knowledge, competencies and skills sets, and attributes presented in table 5.7 (above) also present a combined set of HR qualities in accordance with findings from the document analysis. The HR qualities are perceived as fundamental in the profiling of an HR professional's competence. The HR competency models need to have these elements – as depicted in table 5.7. As the competency concept is linked to performance, for the HR professionals to be considered competent they need to proficiently demonstrate both the combination of theoretical knowledge, core competencies and skills sets – as well as behavioural attributes that enhance performance in a function (see Table 5.7). The HR qualities in Table 5.7 do feature in the HRM literature (Ramlall, 2006; Norton, 2015). The competency concept is understood as enhancing the ability to accomplish job tasks at satisfactory levels of performance (Norton, 2015).

The HR requirements and qualities depicted in the tables above, indicate the evolution and changed patterns of requirements for the field of HR over the past decade. The contemporary needs exemplified by the world of work support the use of present-day competencies – as indicated in various HR competency models that were scrutinised during the data collection in chapter 3.

#### **5.4. KEY DOMAINS OF COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS SETS THAT EMERGED FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS VIA JOB ADVERTISEMENTS**

The following discussion is based on the classification of the data from job advertisements – as depicted on Tables 5.5 to 5.7. As with all qualitative studies, data were organised into main key classifications that led to the emergence of core competencies and skills sets. This categorisation of data included verbatim quotes from the employer community – as suggested by Silverman (2006). As a result of the categorisation, a group of eight HR competencies emerged. A presentation of groups of core competencies and skills sets, which are relevant qualities for HR professionals, follows below:

##### **5.3.4.1. Effective communication**

The following requirements regarding communication were regarded as crucial: We need a person with the *'ability to communicate'*, a person with *'Knowledge of communication strategies'*, the ability to *'Implement and communicate group policies and decisions to staff'*, and *'Communication skills at work'*. This appeared to be a very crucial skill required of HR professionals to acquire, as they need to participate in high level and strategic discussions. As a result, the skill of organise thoughts in a logical manner is vital for HR professionals to possess. In addition, effective communication is vital in the sense that HR professionals will have to analyse and transmit pertinent information to various stakeholders in an organisation. These stakeholders include management, labour/trade unions, employer organisations, and the staff as a whole. The most crucial effect of communication would be amongst various divisions and departments within an organisation. Thus, effective communication plays a critical role and is classified as a management skill (*cf. Suter et al., 2009*).

##### **5.3.4.2. Computer and technical literacy**

Expectations expressed by respondents are as follows: *'computer literacy in the use of MS Office, e-mail and the Internet is crucial'*; the incumbent should *'be computer literate – MS office and Visio as minimum'*. Another verbatim quote is: *'Human resources management and development, Labour relations, Diversity management,*

*Skills development, Communication, Research, Mathematics literacy and Computer literacy*'. This indicated that the employer community placed a high premium on computer skills. Furthermore, they regarded literacy competence as another fundamental competency that HR professionals needed for the execution of their duties. To be literate in job-related aspects such as computer usage and the use of e-mail, and programs such as Outlook and Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Publisher, Access, and PowerPoint) appeared to be crucial for executing their day-to-day tasks. Being computer illiterate in the business world means having to work without the proper knowledge and competence in computer literacy skills (Ngo-Ye, 2014). The emerging trend is clear: basic computer application is essential in the execution of work-related assignments, and this also applies to the HR profession (Daniel, 2010). The electronic systems that are computer operated – such as the HR Information System (HRIS) or HR Management System (HRMS) – are typical examples of computer systems that HR professionals should have mastered in order to execute their duties (Dresser & Associates, 2013; Sadiq, Khan, Ikhtlaq & Mujtaba, 2012).

#### **5.3.4.3. Problem-solving/creativity**

The impact of having and applying problem-solving skills was construed as essential by respondents. Respondents stated that they needed '*Above average problem-solving skills for the position*'; another assertion was: '*Good communication, interpersonal, analytical and problem-solving skills are necessary for the execution of duties*'. This skill is required to analyse and identify how severe the impact of a problem could be (Karatas & Baki, 2013). Effective problem-solving techniques obviously are invaluable to a variety of work-related challenges (Favero & Bullock, 2015). Anderson (2009) asserts that regardless of whether the problem emanates from within the organisation, or whether it is major or minor, the responsibility of a manager is to resolve it successfully. HR professionals are no exception – they are confronted by many organisational conflicts in various forums and situations, and under a variety of circumstances.

#### **5.3.4.4. Interpersonal abilities**

Interpersonal relationships are vital across all parts of an organisation (Vokić & Hernaus, 2005). Respondents indicated the ability to form relationships with co-

workers as being paramount in the execution of work. This was illustrated by phrases like:

*'Excellent communication (verbal and written) and interpersonal skills', Strong people skills/interpersonal skills. Strong administration skills. Understanding of legislation that regulates labour relations'.*

*'Passion for people; sound interpersonal skills; understanding of the business',  
'Interpersonal Relations are crucial'.*

From the data, it became clear that a high premium was placed on interpersonal skills in various organisations. Interpersonal relationships as a professional competency are of crucial importance in the contemporary organisation (Arnold & Boggs, 2015) – as interpersonal skills help with initiating, developing and maintaining sound relationships among employees (DeVito, 2007).

#### **5.3.4.5. Teamwork skills**

In this categorisation, assertions like: *'Team player with a self-starter personality', 'Effective in a team-based environment', 'A strong team-orientation with the ability to use own initiative', 'Integrity High Performance Teamwork', Accountability* were indicative of the role of teamwork. Teamwork was identified as being an important skill because the modern corporate world demands teamwork expertise in order to survive in the competitive environment. The teamwork skills, especially in the workplace, offer staff the opportunity to understand each other better, and, as a result, they can devise means of establishing and maximising shared knowledge and techniques. The crucial aspect of teamwork is also premised on the fact that members of the team learn new expertise and knowledge from others, and this contributes significantly to the performance of the team (Australian Institute of Business: 2016). Another fundamental benefit of teamwork is that members get inspiration from others and also come up with innovative ideas and ways of implementing them for their individual benefit and the benefit of the entire organisation.

#### **5.3.4.6. Planning and organising**

The study revealed that planning and organising skills are fundamental as these skills help HR professionals to focus and work out steps to be taken in order to execute work successfully in an informed way (Fairholm, 2009). This is evidenced by response such

as: *'excellent organisational, planning skills and attention to detail'*; *'negotiation and problem-solving skills with planning and organising skills'*; *'succession planning and individual career development are needed'*, *'personnel planning and agreement by line manager'*, *'Implementation of workforce planning to support current'*. Planning and organising helps define work objectives, the mapping out of outcomes, and setting clear, achievable performance standards (Abbass, 2012).

#### **5.3.4.7. Diversity**

With regard to diversity, a respondent reacted as follows: *'...execute HR programmes (such as compensation, benefits, workforce diversity) and strategy'*, *'HR personnel must have the ability to relate to the diversity of the workforce'*, *'we are committed to enhancing diversity in our workforce'*, and *'Appreciation of diversity'*. The management of diversity in a workplace is a fundamental skill that HR professionals are encouraged to have. It is seen as a critical function of senior management (Gwele, 2009:10). According to Patrick (2012), diversity management is a process that is meant to maintain a positive attitude amongst the staff. In dealing with diversity, HR professionals need to ensure they help in the management of staff for the benefit of the organisation and its human capital resources (Rosado, 2006; Nzozzo, 2011).

#### **5.3.4.8. Leadership and management**

The literature of Schraeder, Self, Jordan and Portis (2014: 50) indicates that management's task is to plan, organise and coordinate, while, on the other hand, the leader's role is said to be that of inspiring and motivating people. Thus, respondents averred that they needed: *'Strong leadership ability'*, *'Strategic capability and leadership'*, *'Sound and in-depth knowledge of relevant prescripts and applications of Human Resources, as well as an understanding of the legislative framework to provide leadership and strategic direction in the company'*, *'Knowledge of management, supervisory, leadership methods and principles'*.

Simply put, the difference between a leader and manager is that leaders have followers – while managers have people that work for them. It is therefore imperative for HR professionals to have competence in both these functions. HR professionals should play a critical role and set a clear example in terms of values and behaviours

that are required for the advancement of the vision, mission and strategic objectives of the organisation (Finkelstein, Hambrick & Cannella, 2009).

#### **5.3.4.9. Vision and strategy**

The mission, vision and strategy in any contemporary organisation is irreplaceable and indispensable. The latter are the standard and critical elements for any organisation to achieve its strategic goals. An established organisation with well matured leadership and management develops both the mission and vision statement with the purpose of creating a guiding document that entails the organisational objectives. It is within this process that the strategic and tactical plans for objectives are formulated and implemented for the efficient operations in organisations.

### **5.4. ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTED VIA THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

An open-ended questionnaire was compiled and sent out to the labour market and specifically to employers of HR graduates across South Africa. This exercise covered national organisations that operate in the Southern Africa region, and international businesses that have branches based in South Africa.

#### **5.4.1. Response rate**

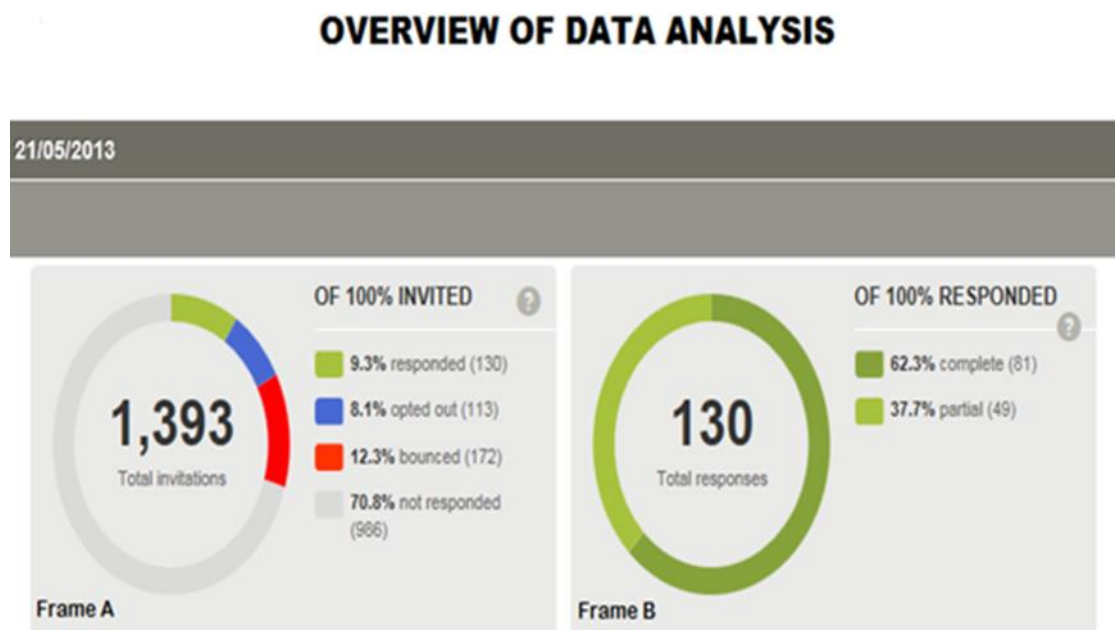
The questionnaire was divided into three sections and comprised 11 questions (three biographical and eight narrative questions). The main aim was to establish the current trend and best practices in terms of requisite HR qualities required from HR professionals by the labour market. The international perspective on HR requisite requirements that would position organisations to be effective and enhance performance – was also discussed in chapter three when various HR Competency Models were presented. A summary of the results of the open-ended questionnaire sent to the labour market, is portrayed below in Figure 5.1.

During the collection period, ten (10) reminder emails were sent to respondents; 11 additions were made to the respondent list, 130 responses were received (which

included 49 completed questionnaires and 81 partially completed), 113 respondents chose not to participate, and 159 emails bounced (errors in communication between servers, which resulted in the emails being undeliverable).

All responses received were compiled into a database for data analysis and interpretation by the researcher. The response rate in the open-ended questionnaire was 9.3%; that is, 130 of the 1 393 participants completed the questionnaire.

An analysis of the number of responses is depicted in Figure 5.1 (below): the total number of invited respondents is shown as Frame A and the number of actual respondents is shown as Frame B.



**Figure 5.1: HR open-ended questionnaire results that shows participation rate**

The presentation and interpretation of the Figure 5.1 is discussed below.

#### **5.4.1.1. Analysis of responses according to the open-ended questionnaires**

- As indicated earlier, 1 393 questionnaires were sent out online to the labour market.

- Of the participants, 9.3% (130 in number) responded.
- Of the selected participants, 8.1% (113), opted not to continue with the open-ended, although they had started with the process.
- With regard to the targeted participants, 12.3% (172) questionnaires bounced.
- Of the targeted participants, 70.8% (986) opted not to participate in the open-ended at all.

## **5.5. NARRATIVE PRESENTATION OF DATA FROM THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

The open-ended questionnaire, as a self-administered method, comprised two types of questions – closed-ended questions about the biographical/demographic information with easy, coded information given, and open-ended questions that provided the opportunity to present responses freely.

The data analysis rendered findings that *inter alia* describe skills that employers often need – and those that they regard as indispensable for HR professionals. In the discussion below (*cf.* 5.5.1) there are examples of what were typically regarded as representative of the overarching skills, knowledge and attributes the respondents, and being of primary importance for the employer community.

The process of analysing the data entailed sorting responses according to the questions posed to the employer community. The questionnaire comprised eight questions to the employer community – to source a variety of information (*cf.* McBurney & White, 2009) on HR qualities. As a result, a large number of variables and factors from the questionnaire were reduced to main categories, with the purpose of identifying the themes for clusters of HR qualities. This process further assisted in determining the HR qualities that need to be offered to HR students during their training. As indicated by some respondents, the factors that were clustered together were indicative of HR qualities that HR professionals should also possess in order to perform competently and to contribute meaningfully to the broader organisational strategic goals and objectives (*cf.* Caliskan, 2010).

In order to illustrate this assertion, few verbatim responses were depicted, and these are outlined below.

### **5.5.1. Main HR competency themes that emerged from the open-ended questionnaire responses**

This section reviews the themes formulated according to the questions posed to participants. This is an attempt to determine what participants regarded as fundamental HR qualities in the execution of their HR work. The discussion and analysis of themes derived from the open-ended questionnaire is presented below.

#### **5.5.1.1. Key factors to identify the best candidate for the position in HR**

The cornerstone of any organisation's growth strategy and prosperity is centred on the identification of high-potential talent (International Labour Office, 2010). In order for organisations to remain competitive, they need to have their talent-management strategy up-to-date and relevant to what the world of work needs (Collings & Mellahi, 2009: 7). The open-ended questionnaire was meant to search for key factors that the labour market perceived as being critical – and the participants' responses, among a multitude of information, are depicted as follows:

**Participant 1:** *'Ability to handle extreme pressure - People knowledge - Knowledge of the employment law in the country - knowledge of the labour law in the country'*

The ability to work under pressure at the workplace would involve mainly dealing with constraints which are often outside of someone's control – these, among others, might be limitation to resources, time constraints, the difficulty to cope with tasks or even mismatch of skills sets that leads to poor performance.

**Participant 2:** *'Change stewardship. Talent Management Strategy architect. Operational executor Business ally'*

The stewardship area of focus hinges on promoting the well-being for each person within an organization while talent management strategist's focus is around the anticipated and required human capital within an organization and this encapsulates strategic planning that leads to realisation of organisational needs.

**Participant 3:** *'Analytical ability, business acumen, technically competent, persuasive'.*

Analytical ability places emphasis on visualising, gather information and deducing and articulating meaning out of it. This entail providing strategic solutions pertaining to complex organisational challenge and making conscious decisions. Analytical skills are essential in the workplace to ensure necessary problem solving occurs to keep productivity and other areas of the workforce functioning smoothly. Business acumen often refers to business savvy and translates to the understanding of thorough business dynamics and the ability to derive at meaningful solutions. This further means the ability to measure SWOT analysis.

**Participant 4:** *'Technical knowhow; Business Acumen; Assertiveness; Strategic.*

The technical know-how concept refers to practical knowledge that primarily bases impetus on how to accomplish set objectives. This is rather a tacit knowledge. Assertiveness would translate to skill to stand one's own ground without infringing on other person's rights. Assertiveness is not by all means associated with destructive aggressiveness, passively accepting erroneous decisions imposed on someone

**Participant 5:** *'Hands-on; Good interpersonal skills; Lateral thinker; empathy; Influential'.*

The character traits indicated above range from practical involvement in a project, acceptable levels of relations with colleagues, innovative thinking and being influential in leading others.

**Participant 6:** *'Empathy/Good Communicator/Good knowledge of labour legislation/Good Listener'.*

The aspects referred to above impacts on a mix of skills and knowledge that is inclusive of displaying acceptable communication levels and the knowledge of legislation related to labour matters. The combination of communication skills and good articulation of labour legislation matters is an intrinsic requirement for an HR professional.

The above were some of the sentiments raised by participants in response to the question that sought to probe what they perceived as fundamental factors that need to be considered when appointing an HR professional.

### **5.5.1.2. Respondent's preferences for a particular key factor which they have identified**

The study also sought to investigate what participants had to say in responding to the question that needed their response on preferences for a particular factor which they have identified. They responded as follows:

**Participant 1:** *'HR professionals should really be able to focus on strategic as well as operational issues. They should be able to coordinate a variety of tasks at the same time and be able to prioritise as needed. HR professionals should be the kind of people who are driven to be on a continuous learning growth curve. Most importantly, HR professionals should be technically and formally qualified through a combination of formal leaning, experience and on-going continuous professional development spanning HR subject matter – as well as core business development areas'*.

**Participant 2:** *'Communication skill, ability to make real assessments, and good knowledge of people'*. Both communication and personal relations have been emphasised and are critical for the successful execution of duties for HR professionals (cf. 5.5.1.1.).

**Participant 3:** *'Must be able to provide HR guidance/support to client group(s) in most of the following areas: competency development, succession planning, talent management, talent acquisition, labour relations, employment law compliance, employee relations, employee engagement, change management and process improvement'*. All aspects mentioned in the assertion above points to the inherent qualities of an HR professional. The successful execution of core duties of HR relies extensively on these aspects.

**Participant 3:** *'Impact - Guides the successful completion of major programmes and often functions in a project leadership role'*. The knowledge of project principles is essential for the good performance especially in a multitasked situation.

**Participant 4:** *'Effects of decisions are long-lasting and influence the future course of the organisation. Errors in judgement or failure to achieve results would result in the expenditure of large amounts of company resources'*. This assertion point to the good decision-making abilities for an HR professional.

**Participant 5:** *'Liaison - Serves as a consultant to management and special external spokesperson for the organisation on major matters pertaining to its policies, projects, or objectives. Uses diplomacy and tact to diffuse high-tension situations, particularly with senior-level internal and external contacts. Occasionally escalates the most serious issues to management'*.

**Participant 6:** *'Mentoring - Participates in the development of others by facilitating training and providing feedback and guidance'*. Mentoring abilities for newly appointed HR professionals is key to enhancing performance as novice may need proper guidance in their designated roles in the workplace.

The preferences depicted above need to be taken into account when training programmes and curricula are developed as they have significant implication that impacts on programme planning and programme design (CHE, 2004). Young (2014) postulates that curricula should be based on what students should know when they leave institutions of higher learning.

#### **5.5.1.3. Respondents experiences with newly appointed HR graduates**

The assertions made below clearly indicates a myriad of experiences that participants encountered in their interaction with newly appointed HR professionals in the workplace. What is of essence is reliance of many participants on labour legislation. Participants clearly places premium labour market issues, and this meaning HR professionals need to have a solid background and application knowledge in labour related legislation. The application of legislation related to the labour market includes The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1997, as updated in January 2015, Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998, as amended in January 2015, Labour Relations Act (LRA) of 1996, as revised in May 2015, Skills Development Act (SDA)

of 1998 as amended in June 2015, Skills Development Levies Act (SDLA) of 1999 as updated in June 2015, National Qualifications Framework Act of 2008., Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) of 1993 as revised in June 2015, Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA) of 1993 and Unemployment Insurance Act (UIF) of 2001.

In responding to this question on the experiences of newly appointed HR graduates, participants responded as follows:

**Participant 1:** *'I have made one appointment that fits this criteria, he fitted in fantastically as he had very good recent law background'.*

The statement above emphasise the fact that labour legislation is essential in the execution of duties by HR professional.

**Participant 2:** *'It varies from employee to employee. Some employees have been successful in most competencies of an HR Professional like time management, adaptability, emotional intelligence etc. However, the scientific understanding and technical abilities as well as legislative application to their work is lacking. Others have the knowledge from their qualifications and apply the scientific aspect more effectively and need development in other areas like time management, handling difficult conversations etc.'*

A combination of skill set depicted here is succinctly illustrated above (cf. 5.5.1.1.).

**Participant 3:** *'Candidates "fresh" from varsity lack the tools needed to function properly in a work situation since they had been exposed to theory and no practical experience. Their expectations usually far exceed their ability. There is a huge disconnect between the schooling system and the workplace'.*

The above assertion points to the necessity for HR students and professionals to acquire the abovementioned skills and competencies as the world of work seem to place them in high regard.

**Participant 4:** *'Unfortunately being a new graduate - all what you know is the theory and no practical experience. HR as a profession is more about best practice and company policies and procedures which you will have to learn and understand only*

*once you start working. HR is also a service profession and employees have varying requests and expectations which needs to be balanced. It is always difficult for newly appointed graduates to understand and adjust, but often within a year of full guidance they do learn’.*

Workplace experience is often cited as a crucial gap at tertiary institutions like universities and Universities of Technology, and such as many students graduate with no work experience whatsoever. Mechanism like on the job training, mentorship and coaching are crucial in helping the newly appointed HR professionals close the gap between tertiary education and the practical world of work.

***Participant 5:*** *‘They become good employees when they are allocated coaches and mentors’.*

This aspects points to the importance of mentoring and coaching that needs to be practiced within the HR field in order to groom and nurture talent for the benefit of an organisation.

***Participant 6:*** *‘Graduates don’t seem to have a “good sense” approach to business – i.e., they are unable to relate HR to the business or to what is going on in the organization’.*

In essence, this means that HR should be familiar with all skills in business that relates to HR. This includes a set of business skills such as communication, planning, organising and delegating to name a few.

***Participant 7:*** *‘If the individual has the required level of cognitive ability and willingness to learn, he/she would have the potential of making a success in the field of HR. The HR manager in this case would need to spend some time guiding/coaching these individuals and giving them exposure to all fields of HR – to ensure they develop to a generalist’.*

The responses above clearly signify the importance of preparedness of HR graduates. The labour market clearly displays, to a certain extent, a lack of preparedness of HR graduates in competently executing their work after they have completed their qualification at HEIs.

All the aforementioned employment laws impacts directly on the employer-employee relationships on a daily basis, and as a result are perceived as pertinent to be understood by HR students and further applied by the labour market.

#### **5.5.1.4. HR graduates ability to fulfil key roles in HR practices using their knowledge and competencies and skills sets**

The inferences made by participants when asked to indicate what key role can HR graduates play with competencies and skills sets and theoretical knowledge sourced from at HEIs, are displayed below:

**Participant 1:** *'I do not think newly qualified HR employees are suited to manage HR functions. Newly qualified persons need to be trained by experienced individuals prior to becoming managers'.*

**Participant 2:** *'Workplace exposure during their academic studies will prove a worthy exercise'.*

**Participant 3:** *'Depending on the institution of origin, not all grads are comparable and competent. There is a lot of exposure and practice needed to prepare graduates for a key role in HR'.*

**Participant 4:** *'They need time to translate theoretical knowledge into practice. It is time consuming. It is best that you identify or recruit them while at university and you expose them to your HR systems during their holidays – for them to adapt better'.*

**Participant 5:** *'If they are fresh from university, clearly they have no work experience. That gets provided to them through training and mentoring'.*

The HE fraternity is again challenged to consider the labour market needs in terms of training HR graduates. The collaboration with HEIs is imperative – given that HR graduates are trained to play a critical role that must add value to organisations.

#### **5.5.1.5. Important competencies and skills set as well as knowledge that would enrich an HR graduate programme**

Having a strong pipeline of highly talented HR graduates is a given factor – since it shows that it can play a vital role in building an organisation’s competitive edge for the future (Snipes, 2005a; Talent Management Staff, n.d.). For this to happen, respondents felt that the HR qualities relevant are:

**Participant 1:** *‘People skills’*. This reflect the ability to workplace for the advancement of the organisation.

**Participant 2:** *‘Internship under a mentor during the period of study’*. This emphasises mentorships skills that HR professionals need to display and master at all times.

**Participant 3:** *‘Business strategy’*. This entails the means through which an HR professional should demonstrate in order to achieve desired objectives of an organisation. It can simply be described as a long-term business planning.

**Participant 4:** *‘Communications’ skills’*. This translating on imparting or exchanging of information via speaking, writing, or even making use of other medium.

**Participant 5:** *‘Emotional intelligence’*. This means the capacity to be aware of, control, and express one's emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships cautiously and empathetically.

**Participant 6:** *‘Basic financial training’*. This aspect points to the necessity for HR professionals to have skills on financial literacy.

**Participant 7:** *‘Good knowledge of basic labour law’*. Labour legislation has been extensive dealt with in 5.5.1.3.

**Participant 8:** *‘Talent management’*. This points to an organization's commitment to recruit, retain, and develop the most talented and superior employees available in the job market aspect has been dealt with in (cf. 5.5.1.1.).

**Participant 9:** *‘Labour relations legislation, skills, EE, Basic Conditions of Employment, Code of Good Practice’*. The labour legislation also referred to as employment law mediates the relationship between workers, employing entities, trade unions and the government. Furthermore, the collective labour law relates to the tripartite relationship between employees, employer and trade unions.

**Participant 10:** *'Strategy'*. This refers to a well-structured plan that is normally designed at the executive level for execution. The strategy is in many instances meant to outline how the overall and long-term aim of the organisation will be rolled out. Given these suggested core qualities, among others, HEIs are challenged to consider these qualities when they develop curricula and review academic programmes for HR qualifications.

**5.5.1.6. Reasons for regarding the identified competencies and skills set, as well as knowledge, as essential for HR professional**

In responding to the question probing what core competencies and skills sets, as well as theoretical knowledge, they regard as essential, participants stated as follows:

**Participant 1:** *'From my experience in training, these are the skills that aid others to assimilate what they are being taught'*.

This indicates the relevance of the skills that were put forward as essential in the execution of HR duties.

**Participant 2:** *'These skills sets are essential, as the modern HR professional needs to understand the business world beyond just offering support – and rather actively engaging in business improvement'*.

The HR professional that a candidate first meets sets the tone for the entire duration of a newly appointed employee in the organisation. Thus, the various skills set referred above (cf 5.5.1.1.) should always be taken into cognisance when training HR professionals.

**Participant 3:** *'As an HR professional you do not operate in a vacuum, but you form part of an organisation. It is important to understand your contribution to the business. This will help you to understand how you service your clients, and how you advise the business and eliminate unnecessary labour unrest'*.

In the fast-paced environment of HR, it is important to seek training that builds the skills most desired by organisations that employ, train and retain efficient HR professionals. Securing leadership knowledge, as well as developing the practical and

soft skills needed for success, can increase the chances of being considered for higher echelons related to HR.

**Participant 4:** *'HR are supposed to be change agents. With these key competencies they will be able to position themselves better in the change management processes'.*

The role of HR change agent pertains to an HR professional from inside or outside the organisation who guides the organisation in the transformation process by placing emphasis issues related to organisational effectiveness, improvement and development for enhanced competitiveness in the market.

**Participant 5:** *'Without the knowledge of the business, the HR professional's input will be irrelevant. This will also assist the HR professional to build a trust relationship with line managers. HR must not only have the knowledge, but also the ability to influence line to make the correct decision. Without this they are not in a position to add value'.*

As it could be understood, and given that the role of HR in organisations has evolved over the years The Role of human resource management in organization has evolved dramatically over the years, HR is certainly has proved to be a critical component of the organisation in many ways. HR profession engage both the employee and the employer for the benefit of the organisation by achieving the strategic goals and objectives. The rationale for HR to play role in organisations is manifold. HR manages the process of linking its function with the strategic objectives of the organisation in order to improve performance.

The above themes (cf. 5.5.1.1 to 5.5.1.6) serve as a roadmap that directs HR professionals in terms of the wide scope of their responsibility in organisations. The analysis of the findings of the study further illustrates the various emerging HR clusters of factors that summarise the perceptions of the labour market. Tables 5.5 to 5.7 categorised the responses of the participants according to the main emergent themes perceived to be relevant for HR professionals to possess. These would be a set of requisite HR qualities that the world of work considers vital in the execution of HR function. HEIs are encouraged to consider the inclusion of these fundamental HR qualities in HR curricula and graduate training programmes.

The data generated through the distribution of the open-ended questionnaire to the labour market was categorised according to common and similar qualities that, in turn, provided main core of HR competencies and skills - as well as theoretical knowledge that seeks to equip an HR professional and graduates with the relevant qualities that the labour market perceives as being key in the execution of work. These emergent domains of HR competencies came about as a result of the data analysis process. The domains of HR competencies clustered in Table 5.6 are suggested as fundamental skills necessary for inclusion in HR graduate curricula and training programmes. The HR domains referred to are reflected by participants in both the document analysis and open-ended questionnaire, as the methods used to collect data from the labour market. In addition, the HR domains in Table 5.6 are an interface between higher education and the world of work, and they are perceived as being significant tools that shape the skills needs of HR professionals. The HR curricula and related programmes must expose newly graduated HR students to these competencies, in order to enable them to advance competence in the workplace and also enhance performance profoundly in organisations.

The analysis of the questionnaire was useful, as it outlined qualities that an HR graduate and professional is expected to possess, in order to add value to the organisation. The responses of participants to the open-ended questionnaire clearly indicated that newly appointed HR graduates do not merely need to be conversant with the HR body of knowledge; rather, they must be able to apply that knowledge to quell challenges that confront their organisations, and this is in line with sentiments of Crossman and Clarke (2010). In addition, according to Ulrich *et al.* (2012), HR professionals world-wide are increasing in alarming numbers, and, as a result, they also need to ensure that they add the expected value that puts organisations on improved levels of performance. The effectiveness and value-adding of HR professionals is therefore imperative, as organisations need to survive, grow and compete with others in the labour market (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2012: Online) further reinforce this assertion via the statement below:

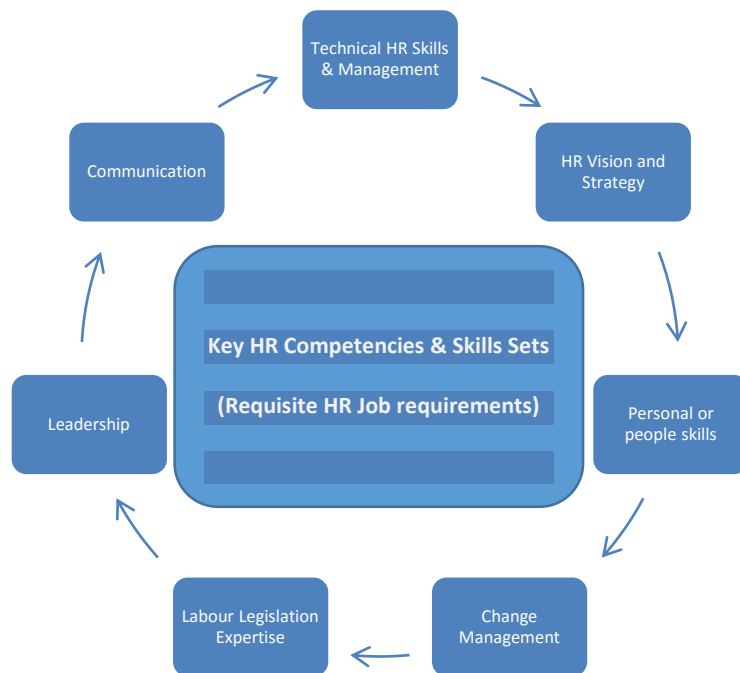
*In a constantly changing world, there has never been a greater need to identify what HR professionals must be, know, do, and deliver to contribute more fully to their organisations.*

The above statement signifies what HR professionals are expected to display in order to demonstrate the effectiveness and overall performance of the organisations concerned. This clearly implies that HR professionals need expertise that will prepare them to provide insightful advice to management and on strategic matters relating to the organisation (Ulrich *et al.*, 2013). This will ensure that they earn respect and recognition, and, finally, are in a better position when strategic matters are discussed.

## **5.6. HR COMPETENCIES AND SKILLS SETS THAT EMERGED FROM THE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE DATA**

The coding of data from the open-ended questionnaire, led to the formulation of clusters/categories of HR qualities with similar characteristics that are depicted on Tables 5.5 to 5.7. The clusters/categories revealed seven (7) main domains of HR competencies: Vision and Strategy; Technical HR Skills and Management; People Skills (Personal Relations); Change Management; Communication; Leadership as well as Labour Legislation Expertise.

Figure 5.6 below depicts the HR qualities that emerged from the data analysis. These will be discussed in the context of the main themes that emerged during the qualitative data analysis.



**Figure 5.2. Clusters of factors summarising perceptions of the labour market**

### 5.6.1. The characteristics of a well-performing HR professional

According to the literature study (Ulrich *et al.*, 2012; Tamkin, Hirsh & Tyers, 2003; Caldwell, 2010), there are a number of factors and qualities that shape the character of a good HR professional. The data analysis process on the open-ended questionnaire responses led to key HR competency domains and sub-factors that the world of work perceived as being fundamental in the execution of the duties of HR professionals. These competency domains and sub-factors are also regarded as fundamental and would strongly be suggested for inclusion in HR programmes.

A brief account of each HR competency is provided below:

#### 5.6.1.1. *HR mission, vision and strategy*

The HR professional is expected, first and foremost, to understand the business strategy and thereafter to link the required competencies and capabilities at organisational level to the specific HR strategy. The crucial point is for HR to map out how best to leverage the human capital to achieve the organisational objectives (Schuler, 1992). According to Sparrow (2010), the HR vision and strategy should be

about enabling and empowering the organisational human capital to perform optimally. The tool to achieve this rests with the implementation of relevant knowledge, competencies and attributes of HR professionals. In observing the studies reported by Brauns (2013) and Ulrich, Brockbank and Johnson (2009a), it becomes clear that the critical features of an effective HR strategy are bound to promote the organisation's vision and mission, and align the HR function with the strategy of the organisation. This is an integrated way in which HR functional strategies should operate. In addition, the integrated strategy of HR includes critical tasks that encompass the entire scope of talent management, staffing or recruitment, development, and performance. HR practitioners must understand the business, the direction, and how HR can impact on results.

These statements clearly indicate that an HR strategy that takes into account the vision and strategic goal of the organisation, is paramount.

#### **5.6.1.2. *Interpersonal or people skills***

Bhat, Rao and Pai (2014) defined the concept of interpersonal skills as:

*... the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People who have worked on developing strong interpersonal skills are usually more successful in both their professional and personal lives.*

The role of an HR professional in developing people skills is critical. The HR professional needs to be seen as a relationship builder, with the ability to build sound relationships amongst the executive and lower levels of management – as well as with the general workforce.

The above statements clearly demonstrate the importance of interpersonal skills that need to be displayed by HR professionals at the workplace.

### **5.6.1.3. Change management**

The effect of change management in the contemporary organisation has brought about significant and dynamic strategic and operational developments. The rationale for change management in any given circumstance, is to improve on the status quo, in order to deliver increased performance (Burnes, 2004). The management of change is crucial in a variety of ways – such as the strategic direction that the organisation opts to take in an endeavour to advance the vision and strategic goals, and further to justify its existence in the fierce competitive world (Samuel, 2013). This assertion has a bearing on strategic projects like change in operations, change of organisational strategy, or even the implementation of strategic projects like the overhauling or modification of a university, the curriculum, and methods of operating a university to achieve goals other than education (*cf.* Bernard, 2012:7-15). Bernard (2012) further maintains that change management “*could include reducing costs, improving the throughput, or improving the quality of education*”.

The opinions expressed above indicate how the respondents perceived the concept of change management as being crucial for their organisations to thrive, and thus the HR professionals need to acquire the knowledge and competence in the implementation of change management processes – as and when necessary.

### **5.6.1.4. Labour legislation expertise**

Another crucial competency that manifested distinctively in the data analysis was competency in labour legislation. Knowledge of and competency in the interpretation of labour legislation have become fundamental in recent times, as most organisations have a very strong, unionised workforce (Amos, Ristow & Pearse, 2009). The workforce has become aware of their rights at the workplace, and thus competency in HR professional skills which have a bearing on labour legislation, has also become pertinent. Amos *et al.* (2009:98) aver that the analysis of the labour market is pertinent and that determining the latest trends on skills, both locally and globally, is paramount. Meanings that respondents expressed to illustrate the need for competency in labour legislation, included:

#### **5.6.1.5. Leadership**

For any strategic endeavour in an organisation to be successful, strong leadership is needed (Jooste & Fourie, 2009). The data analysis rendered results that indicated that respondents maintained a significant stance on the importance and role of strategic leadership, on aspects like the management of scarce and limited resources, and also the management of resources during ‘tight’ times (Lear, 2012). Strategic leadership is a pertinent and key element in the implementation process of new strategies that seek to redirect and refocus the direction of an organisation. Strong leadership also is required in the fierce competition for survival in the market – as well as in getting and retaining talent in an organisation. Tedmond (n.d.) maintains that: *“Leadership permeates society, but from a business perspective it is the identification, development, and use of organisational leadership which is critical to organisational performance”*. This implies that the duty to think strategically and make sound decisions that take into account the future of the organisation, is within the purview of top management – that takes on the leadership role in an organisation. Respondents indicated that leadership attributes, skills, strategic thinking and proactive planning, are pertinent for HR practitioners. The world of work is in need leadership that is resolute and has the focus to take the organisation to the next level.

#### **5.6.1.6. Communication**

The role of effective communication in the functioning of organisations is crucial. In illustrating the importance and strategic role of communication in an organisation, the respondents resolutely put forward crucial statements that indicate the need for effective communication, and they had this to say:

- *Communication and reporting skills are necessary*
- *Clear, unambiguous communication is important as well as the ability to report effectively to senior management*
- *Good verbal and written communication is also critical*

These statements clearly indicate that the labour market puts a high premium on effective communication. The importance of effective communication, at a strategic level, cannot be over-emphasised. Effective communication is a key factor in

conveying strategic messages to the workforce community. Various authors on effective communication emphasise this – for example, Kline (2011, np):

*Does everyone in your organization clearly understand the organisational strategy and how they fit into it? Employees want to know where they fit into the overall strategy, and how their roles contribute to the success of the organisation. A clear understanding of the organisational strategy is fundamental to achieving goals and objectives. The key to developing this understanding at all levels of an organisation is effective communication. When implementing the Balanced Scorecard, the scope of an organisation's internal communication can make or break the efforts.*

Frost (n.d.) purports that:

*The workplace necessitates a frequent communication system between colleagues, human resources and management staff within the organisation. Companies also communicate with the outside entities, such as suppliers, clients, and general public. A corporate communication strategy plan lays out how to handle the various forms of communication dispersed by the company. Understanding the benefits and purpose of the plan helps as you develop your own communication strategy.*

These statements clearly indicate that effective communication keeps various stakeholders in an organisation connected and updated – and thereby enables work to be efficiently executed, and ultimately supports the striving for the realisation of goals (Nordin, 2014).

#### **5.6.1.7. Technical HR skills**

Technical knowledge is of primary importance for HR professionals – as they must ensure high-quality work in all HR areas that render services to the entire organisation, in order to deliver better performance. The technical activities entail the processes and systems and procedures in the administration of HR policies – as well as the overall staff benefits (*cf.* Wright & McMahan, 1992). Furthermore, HR technical skills and competencies define what HR professionals in an organisation need to know and

competently execute in their varying roles. These are referred to as the hard skills of HR (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). In organisations, HR professionals that move up the ladder to top HR management are the product of HR specialties, and have demonstrated they understand broader business and strategic realities – not just HR management functional issues (SHRM Foundation, 2014). This aspect covers a wide range of HR required qualities, while it also points to the importance of human resource technical management qualities.

In addition to the factors displayed in Figure 5.2 above, the data analysis further revealed the personal attributes of HR professionals that are highly regarded by the world of work. In addition, the data made it clear that employers place a high premium on value-driven practices.

Further to competencies, skills sets and theoretical knowledge, the above data also revealed that there are also personal attributes of HR professionals that were considered as being imperative by the world of work. These attributes are, among others: the drive to deliver; being good role models; displaying the ability to be skilful influencers and collaborators; and being decisive and independent thinkers. These personal attributes were indicated as qualities that one cannot be trained to acquire, but which rather come naturally or are learnt via observation and without formal training.

According to Sackett and Walmsley (2014), employees in a work situation are faced with a variety of challenges and demands that must be dealt with in a manner that will not affect work performance adversely. The personal attributes alluded to above play a critical role in this regard, as HR professionals need these attributes in their daily encounters with evolving demands posed by the world of work. It is clear that the workplace places a premium on diverse HR qualities that the HR professional needs to master, and those qualities are summed up in three main categories: HR knowledge, skills sets competencies and attributes that are depicted in various HR Competency Models as discussed in the literature review chapters, and lastly the personal attributes that HR profession need for practising professionals as Sackett and Walmsley (2014) declared.

## 5.7. CONCLUSION

Various HR competency models were discussed in-depth in the literature review chapters. The models discussed included the Human Resource Competency Study (HRCS) developed by Ulrich *et al.* (2008b), the RBL Group at Michigan University, the Office of Personnel Management's Human Resources Competency Model (1999), and the model of the Society of Human Resource Management (2008). The analysis of data in the literature chapters had the purpose of identifying perceptions of the employer community (EC) in terms of the HR competencies that the contemporary organisation needs.

Studying the HR competencies as depicted in the HR Competency Models (*cf.* 3.1), led to the conclusion that there is a commonality of factors in all HR competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes, in most of the Competency Models (*cf.* 3.1 & 3.2). The other significant fact is that the study revealed that there is clear evidence that the evolution of HR Competency Models has illustrated new and relevant HR competencies that the world of work needs (*cf.* 2.2, 2.3 & 3.1). The study also found that what is lacking in most HR Competency Models, is a clear distinction of HR competencies that the various levels of work require. HR is also expected to demonstrate its contribution to the bottom line in terms of enhancing quality and profit maximisation through the proper management of human resources. The search for talent in strategic HR positions, especially at senior level, is also surging expeditiously – since HR has a role to play at strategic level. Therefore, the training of quality HR graduates has become a focal point, and this is considered in light of organisations focusing on gaining a more competitive edge over other competitors in the market.

In conclusion, the study has illustrated that the role of HR professionals in organisations has transitioned from the transactional, technical and administrative in nature – to a newer strategic role. Thus HR clearly has a significant role to play in terms of the development and accomplishment of organisational goals and objectives. This transition – due partly to the changing nature of work in knowledge-based industries and the global competition for talent – will continue to cement human capital as a key asset in organisations, while simultaneously changing the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required of HR professionals. Reflecting on the changing nature and role of HR professionals, it is essential that HR education prepares the future

labour pool of HR professionals with the competencies needed to meet the demands of this new and changing role. Research on HR qualities has been categorising current best practices of educational programmes available to HR students, including the curriculum, and also examining how these practices relate to successful career progression in the HR field.

This chapter attempted to identify core competencies and skills sets, as well as attributes that the world of work expects and perceives as being important in the execution of work. Furthermore, the study extracted the most common HR qualities and requirements that could be considered by HEIs during curricular development and programme review processes.

## *Chapter Six*

### *Conclusion, limitations and recommendations*

#### **6.1. Introduction**

The focus of this study was based on the labour market expectation of a University of Technology's graduates in Human Resource Management and the subsequent implication for programme planning – with some focus on the curriculum development for HR. With the attempt to investigate relevant HR qualities that emerged as competencies and skills sets, knowledge in the form of theory, and attributes that form the core content of HR curricula and programmes – the study of various HR competency models became imperative. Thus, the literature on HR competency models developed into a useful source that guided the study on the development of new competencies and skills sets, knowledge, and attributes (*cf.* 3.1). The literature review chapter revealed constant evolution on HR Competency models over the past two decades. The development of HR competency models has a direct impact on the manner in which organisations operate at both strategic and operational levels (*cf.* 3.3). Furthermore, the new skills sets, competencies and attributes that are presented as a result of the evolution of HR competency models and the HR function, assist the labour market to keep abreast of developments in the field and profession of HR.

The HR knowledge, competencies and skills sets as well as attributes are seen as the basis of any HR programme, and are further to be considered as the core of the curriculum – as they form the content of a learning programme.

#### **6.2. AIM OF STUDY**

The aim of this study, as indicated in chapter one, was to investigate the relevant competencies and skills sets, knowledge, and attributes that the world of work expects HR graduates to possess after the completion of studies at HEIs, and further examines what a relevant and responsive HR curriculum and programme should be.

### **6.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The problem statement for this study was to investigate the requisite competencies and skills sets that the labour market perceive as relevant for HR professionals to possess after the completion of studies. The investigation intended to probe into whether HR graduate training, programmes and curricula are sufficiently responding to the needs of the labour market. Given global trends, the HR profession needs to ensure that it keeps up with the developments taking place in organisations – in order to ensure it renders strategic support and contributes meaningfully when strategic decisions are taken. Therefore, the training of HR graduates and imparting of relevant competencies and skills sets, knowledge, and attributes, are key.

An overview and rationale of each chapter will be presented in the next few paragraphs.

### **6.4. AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT CHAPTERS**

#### **6.4.1. Chapter one**

This chapter provided a general orientation and background to the study (*cf.* 1.1 & 1.2), as well as the rationale (*cf.* 1.3), theoretical framework for the study (*cf.* 1.4). The problem statement, research questions, objectives and research design have also been formulated.

#### **6.4.2. Chapter two**

This chapter provided a literature review on the holistic evolution of HR and the role of Higher Education in ensuring the relevance of programmes and the preparedness of graduates for the world of work (*cf.* 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6). The chapter also discussed the types of universities that offer HR training, the curriculum and its relevance in students' preparedness for the labour market. The last part of the chapter introduced the concept of HR competency models.

#### **6.4.3. Chapter three**

This chapter focused on the evolution of and global trends associated with HR competency models. A glimpse of the HR revolution and the resultant HR model

introduced in South Africa are also discussed. The chapter also provided a synthesis of HR competencies according to the perceptions of the labour market.

#### **6.4.4. Chapter four**

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology applied in the study. Qualitative inquiry and the different data-collection methods associated with it are therefore discussed.

#### **6.4.5. Chapter five**

The presentation and discussion of the results of the study are presented in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the new domains of HR competencies that should be considered when HR curricula and programme planning processes are initiated.

#### **6.4.6. Chapter six**

This chapter concludes with a discussion of the most important findings of the study and states its implications for HR academic programme and curriculum development.

### **6.5. CONSOLIDATION OF THE MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON HR REQUIREMENTS**

The report on HR requirements and qualities according to the data analysed from the literature review in chapter two and three respectively, the literature review, document analysis (advertisements) on job advertisements and the analysis of open-ended questionnaires in chapter five is presented and discussed below. The data collection via the latter methods culminated to the initial HR models that are displayed below (Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3). The new original HR competency model that the study has introduced, as based on the analysis of the data presented and discussed in chapter five, is presented below (*cf.* 6.6). Various HR competencies and/ or requirements that were classified and clustered to form the three initial HR models in 6.5.1, 6.5.2 and 6.5.3 as well as ultimately the final consolidated HR competency model for the study were discussed in-depth in chapter three (*cf.*3.4), chapter five (*cf.*5.3, 5.4 & 5.5) as well as in chapter six (6.6) below.

This section will deal with the classification of HR competencies that emerged from different data collection methods that led to the emergence of three preliminary HR models as well as the new original consolidated HR competency model for the study.

### **6.5.1. Literature review**

The literature study as a data collection technique yielded valuable evidence on the trends and development in the evolution of HR. These developments and trends are summarised as follows:

- a)** The seven HR Competency Models (*cf.* 3.1) evidently made a significant contribution in terms of revealing the requisite HR competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes, that the labour market expects HR professionals to display in the execution of their work assignments.
- b)** The literature review provided in-depth patterns of development and evolution given changes such as globalisation, demographics of the workforce, technological changes, and continuous organisational changes that led to increased importance of managing the human resource function in a more strategic way (*cf.* 5.2.1).
- c)** The HR Competency models also provided the study with requisite HR qualities from global research entities such as RBL, SHRM Cornell ILR, SABPP and others (*cf.* 3.2). Moreover, highly acclaimed researchers like Ulrich, Brockbank and Paauwe, to name a few, also contributed significantly in terms of their research work that was related to HR competencies, skills and knowledge (*cf.* 3.2). . This will ensure that HR students get globally recognised HR competencies and skills sets and this will also enable them to compete at an international level when they apply for employment.
- d)** The dawn of contemporary HR competency models, with a set of domains and sub-factors that are internationally recognised, are perceived as giving HR graduates an advantage to play a meaningful role and contribute immensely to the strategic matters of the organisation
- e)** The HR competency model studies are also perceived as positioning the HR function to respond to changes in its complex, highly competitive and fiercely

challenged environment – in terms of increased demand for the enhanced quality of HR graduates that provides support and develops credible initiatives for the organisation.

- f) The evolution of HR competency models signified requisite HR competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes that need to be reflected HR curricula and programmes.

The analysis of information generated via the data collection methods became an attempt by the study to distinguish itself from the existing research. The impetus was placed on the consolidation of data to form the basis for a new original HR competency model for HR management competences. The HR model will further be recommended for consideration by HEI, especially UoTs, when new programmes are planned and during the curricula development processes.

The literature review summed up the value of HR in various organisations that participated in the study by providing the requisite qualities that HR professionals need to master in order to be deemed competent at the workplace. Figure 6.1 below displays HR competencies that emanated from the literature review. The HR competencies displayed in Figure 6.1 are not listed in the sequence of importance.

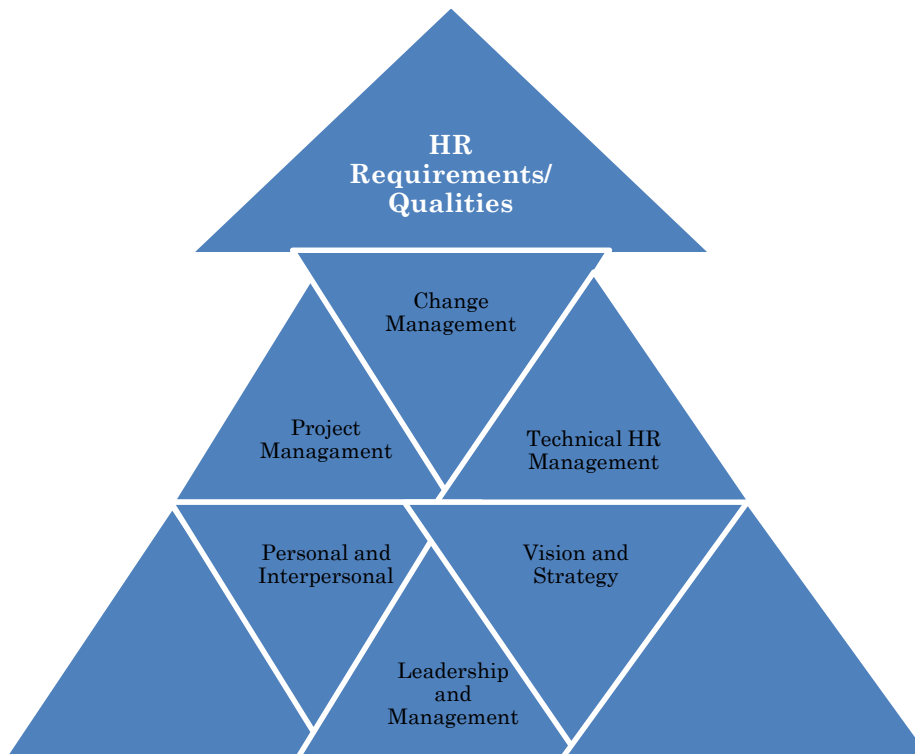


Figure 6.1: HR competency model according to the data from the literature review.

Given the HR competency models that were scrutinised during the literature review, it is indeed apparent that there is still more research work that will ensure HR students and professionals compete at a global level.

As the evolution of HR Competency models took place in other parts of the world, the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) had some research work done around HR competencies, standards and professional practice (3.2.7). The latter development in South Africa took research work related to HR best practices to higher levels. As a result of research on HR standards, competencies and best practices, the SABPP introduced the first HR Competency Model designed to cater the needs of Southern Africa (paragraph 3.2.7). The competencies and skills sets displayed in the SABPP HR model could also be used to benchmark the international standard, and help HEIs to consider them when they review curricula and programmes.

### **6.5.2. Document analysis of job advertisements**

The document analysis became a useful mechanism in terms of identification of the HR qualities. As it was the case with the literature review, the document analysis process also revealed what the world of work anticipates to get from HR graduates. The most sought-after HR qualities that employers expect HR graduates to be competent in, are depicted in the analysis chapter five (*cf.* 5.3). The analysis of the job advertisements, during the document analysis process, identified a variety of HR qualities that the employer community (EC) expects HR graduates to display in the workplace. As with the results of the literature review and the open-ended questionnaire, the document analysis on job advertisements clearly defined the main classification and categorisation of HR competencies that the labour market needs. These are HR competencies and skills sets, knowledge, and attributes. The various sub-factors under each main classification are depicted in tables 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7. The main categorisation of HR qualities that emerged from the analysis of the job advertisements were discussed, and verbatim quotes of respondents were included in the discussion (*cf.* 5.4).

While in the process of writing up job descriptions, it became clear from the data analysis that the labour market vividly ensured that the description included elements such as detailed list of tasks, a comprehensive list of job responsibilities, a detailed list of job skills as well as the detailed list of job competencies. This approach required the labour market to rephrase certain essential functions or job responsibilities pertaining to a specific job competence according to the level of execution. This approach used competencies and knowledge as the base which enabled it to be integrated with other talent management programmes in organisations.

Thus, Figure 6.2 below illustrates a set of HR requirements from the document analysis that the world of work perceives as fundamental in the execution of duties by HR professionals.



Figure 6.2: HR requirements/ qualities generated from the Document Analysis (Advertisements)

The document analysis on job advertisements became a useful mechanism for providing clear information that relates to integrating theoretical knowledge, competencies and skills sets that are fundamental in the HR profession.

### 6.5.3. Open-ended questionnaire

The analysis of the open-ended questionnaire, as it was the case with the literature review and document analysis of job advertisements, also provided the study with relevant and up-to-date information that pertains to contemporary HR competencies and skills, knowledge, and attributes necessary for the labour market – and for consideration in HR curricula development and programme planning and review.

The main finding in this section relates to the six themes that emerged from the open-ended questionnaire. The themes referred to here will help the study establish the key factors, preferences, experiences, and abilities expected from HR graduates. Figure 6.3 shows the HR requirements as gathered via the open-ended questionnaire.

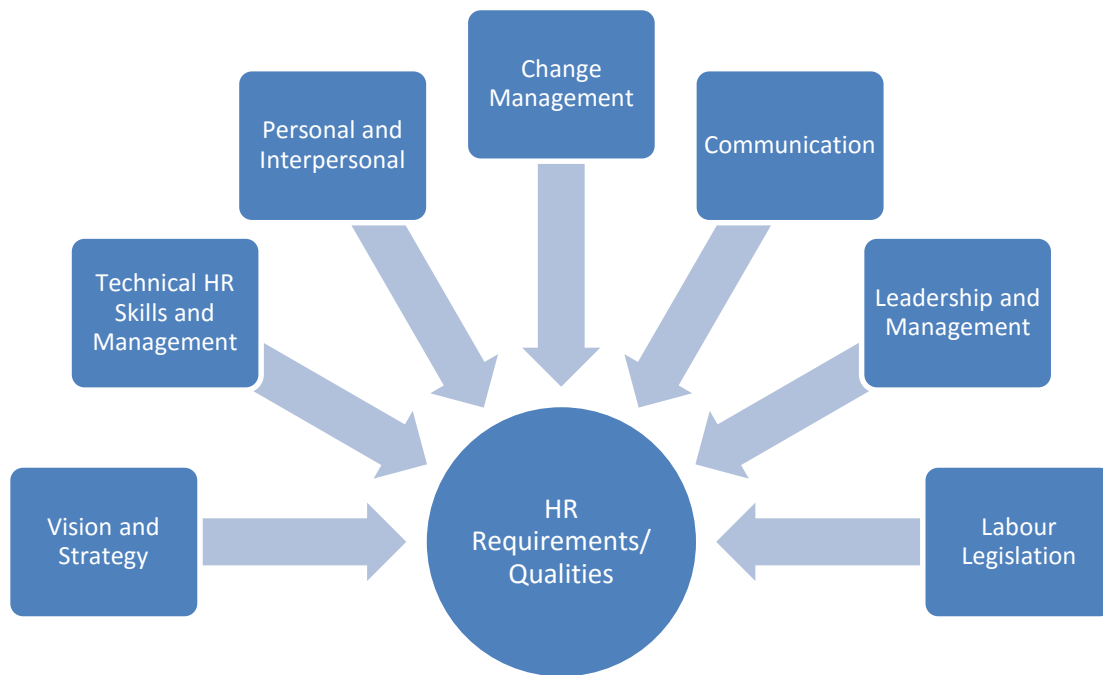


Figure 6.3: HR requirements/ qualities generated from the Open-Ended Questionnaire analysis.

To conclude, the study also probed the reasons for regarding the identified competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes, as being essential. The main and new emerging cluster of qualities that are perceived as being fundamental for the execution of HR work, are also clearly tabulated and discussed. These HR qualities will be presented and recommended for inclusion in the HR curricula.

### 6.6. THE NEW ORIGINAL HR COMPETENCY MODEL

To this end, the HR models shown above culminated to the final HR competency model that seek to distinguish the study from other existing research as deep-rooted in the HR models discussed above (*cf.* 6.5). The new HR model has the classification of HR competencies into three levels. The three HR competency models that emerged from the different methods of data analysis above (*cf.* 6.5.1, 6.5.2 & 6.5.3) led the study to introduce a more consolidated set of HR competencies that are suggested to be considered by the labour market for implementation and for inclusion during the curriculum development process as well as during the programme planning phase at HEIs. Figure 6.4 displays the final set of HR competencies. The overarching

integration of the HR competencies in the initial models as displayed above culminated to the main HR competency model for the study (Figure 6.4).

### Elements of an HR Competency Model

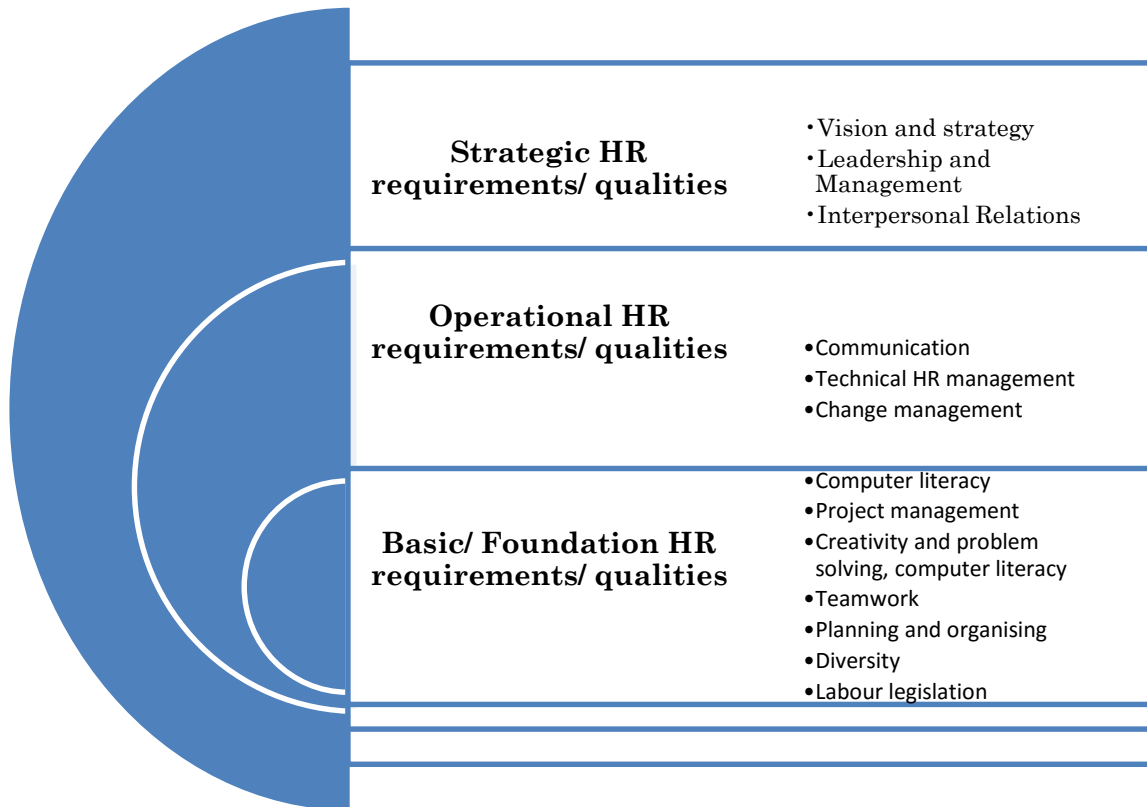


Figure 6.4: Integrated elements of a HR competency model

The analysis of the HR competencies above clearly spells out requisite HR competencies that the world of work expects HR graduates to have when they complete their studies HR programmes. As deduced from the classification of HR competencies from the three sources of data displayed above, it is apparent that the labour market places more emphasis on three differentiated levels of importance regarding the requisite HR competencies. The first level HR competencies are perceived as fundamental and critical in the role that HR professionals play at the strategic level while the second, operational level, and third level, the basic or

foundation level, of HR competencies are perceived as essential for operational performance of HR duties.

### **6.6.1. The strategic phase of HR requirements**

The first level of HR requirements/ qualities is composed of requirements such as *personal and interpersonal skills, leadership and management abilities as well as vision and strategy*. As HR is constantly striving to improve its function and align HR strategy, the study revealed the three qualities that are fundamental to perform at a strategic level of an organisation. The HR professionals that operate at the strategic level are professionals that have all the capabilities found at the operational and basic or foundation levels, but have refined their skills through experience across business cycles and across different types of organizations. They are adept at seeing the big picture and think outside their own domain to enhance the success of the organization in which they work. They have left the technical aspects of the HR function behind for the most part and now focus on long-term strategy and on implementing systems at an organization-wide level.

As the literature review chapter has indicated, HR need to respond to global competition as this is more necessary than ever. To achieve this goal, HR need to implement the right HR strategy in order to improve the performance and effectiveness of the organisation. Furthermore, it has been emphasised in the study that HR strategy must be aligned with the organization's vision, mission and goals. In developing an HR strategy, the organisation must analyse the characteristics of its industry, determine its competitive advantage, and identify key processes and key people with the right set of knowledge and competencies at the strategic level. It is at the strategic level that strategic HR management requires that HR professionals consider the overall picture of the organisation's growth, implementing ways to make a direct contribution to the long-term goals. Therefore, strategic HR is integral to the future planning of the organisation as it relates to employees. In a strategic capacity, HR professionals attempt to project future business needs and work to develop current employees and programmes to meet those needs.

However, given the information that was generated during the data collection process, it can be difficult to decide how to prioritise the overwhelming number of activities that fall under this umbrella. The rationale being that some of the qualities do overlap under the operational classification and the basic classification. The HR requirements depicted under this category were only generated with the help of the limited data that was gathered during the coding process. This implies that the HR requirements list that are needed at the strategic level as portrayed in this study is not exhaustive. Further research can establish more HR requirements qualities that can add value at the strategic functioning of HR.

### **6.6.2. The operational phase of HR requirements**

The second level of HR requirements/ qualities is shaped by elements such as *communication, technical HR management, and change management*. Furthermore, HR professionals at the operational level can be found in either specialist or generalist positions. Individuals at this level have responsibilities such as, but not limited to, managing projects, programmes, and initiatives; implementing plans passed down by the executive management; and delegating tasks to entry-level staff. In professional matters, individuals at this level can act independently as they are expected to understand and be capable in all the HR functions and are able to understand how all the functions work together within a larger system.

Thus, this level of HR requirements seeks to equip and enable HR professionals to successfully deal with day-to-day operations that are essential in meeting the needs of the entire employees in an organisation. As the literature has indicated, the operational duties of HR are mainly attached to important processes such as maintenance of employee records, processing of payroll, implementing seamless and efficient administrative processes and technologies. Furthermore, operational HR management may use and maintain computerised HR information systems of the organisation and the creation of employee rewards programmes as well as developing social programmes to engage employees. Attending operational meetings with line managers, as well as devising and implementing training programmes, may be part of

an operational HR professional's day, hence the HR qualities mentioned above could be of great importance. A chief function for operational HR professional is to keep abreast of employment laws and making certain they are consistently followed as failure to operate in line with legislation could be costly to the organisation.

There is a trend now lately that key construct in various proposed HR model that HR practitioners are shifting away and no longer will make operational decisions, but rather act as consultants to other business functions by designing, developing, and delivering programmes that give line managers the tools and training they need to effectively perform their responsibilities.

### **6.6.3. The basic or foundation phase of HR requirements**

The basic or foundation level, is mainly about HR professionals with the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities to perform various HR functions at the entry level and these roles are mostly administrative in nature. Individuals at this level have responsibilities such as, but not limited to, supporting HR initiatives, executing tasks passed down from management, and operating at the tactical and transactional levels. These roles could be understood as technologist or technician roles. This level of HR competence is comprised of HR requirements/ qualities such as *project management*, *computer literacy (skills)*, *creativity and problem solving abilities*, *teamwork*, *planning and organising*, *diversity* as well as knowledge on *labour legislation* matters. There is a fine line between the operational and basic functions of HR. The basic function could be entrusted to the newly appointed HR professionals as the entry to the HR profession. In order for the HR professional to execute duties successfully, the HR requirements under the basic classification are useful and fundamental in nature. The four Basic Functions of Human Resource Management are acquisition of human resource, hiring people, development of human resource, meaning preparing staff to execute their duties competently, maintenance of human resources which is about retaining personnel.

While the data on HR competencies signified the crucial role of HR professionals by placing HR competencies at three different levels in the execution of duties, the most important fact that needs to be taken into cognisance is that the HR competencies function independently. The various HR qualities that prevailed during the classification and analysis of data form the basis for a crucial pool of HR requirements that enable HR to play a significant role in the implantation of both the organisational and HR strategy. This implies that the HR requirements referred to in the study such as the theoretical knowledge, technical competencies and skills sets as well as attributes are perceived as fundamental in the realisation of the organisations' vision and strategic goals.

As indicated on chapter two of the study, the HR management traditional approaches focused on operational such as HR planning, job analysis, recruitment and selection employee relations, performance management, compensation and training and development. Furthermore, HR's traditional approach placed premium on the establishment of policies, procedures as well as contracts, to name a few. These activities were meant to drive performance and achieve organisational goals by making employees adhere to the set of documents related to policies, procedures and contracts.

However, the documented approaches spelt out above impacted marginally in terms of their contribution to the organisational vision and strategic goals as they put thrust entirely on standardised and inflexible processes and procedures. The fulfilment and alignment of HR strategy to the broader corporate strategy and strategic goals were given the necessary attention as compared to the contemporary organisation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The HEI fraternity, and specifically the UoTs, is implored to consider the consolidated analysis of HR requirements that emanates from the study as they form the basis for a new original HR competency model for HR management competences. Furthermore, the HR competency model introduced by the study is suggested to be used as a guideline for programme planning and implementation of UoTs curricula

which incorporates the expectations of the labour market, as set out in the aim of this study.

## **6.7. IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME PLANNING AND HR MANAGEMENT FOR UoTs**

A strategic approach to the outcomes of programme design, development and approval considers how proposed provision reflects the higher education provider's mission and strategic goals as well as assuring academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities (*cf.* 4.2). As it is evidenced in the literature review in chapter two and three,

Thus, in relation to HR programmes for graduates at UoTs, HR programmes needs to reflect a set of competences that enables HR professionals to be effective in people management as this is one of the most powerful tools available today for organizations seeking to achieve long-term competitive advantage. Increasingly, even companies globally undergo restructuring in their HR departments. These developments are inclined more on new areas such as information technology in HR-service delivery and leverage an increasingly diverse talent pool within and across national labour markets to enhance their competition edge over others in market. HR professionals need to have strong business, professional, and technical competencies to create and implement talent management and performance management systems that attract, motivate, and retain high-quality employees. The major in HR programme must be designed in such a way that it help graduates tackle these professional challenges. The content of the HR management major must be designed to be consistent with the contemporary organisations that do a lot of research on HR competencies, knowledge and expertise, and these are, among others, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Michigan Ross Business School, the RBL Group, SABPP .

The study recommends that the curricular development and programme planning in HEIs take cognisance of the relevant aspects revealed in the data analysis chapter five (*cf.* 5.1). In ensuring that the international benchmark is taken into account, the study recommends that the stages of curriculum development provided and the

fundamental steps for teaching practical skills are considered (*cf.* 4.2). The set of phases in the development of curricula is also crucial to be considered by university curricula developers and programme designers. The programme cycle illustrates clearly how the programme cycle involves the needs assessment, programme design, programme implementation, and review of outcomes (*cf.* 4.2).

### **6.7.1. Programme planning and design**

As evidenced in the study (*cf.* 1.2.2) programme planning includes various guidelines in the form of and criteria for programme design and planning that could also be useful in curriculum development. The main pillars of the latter process centres on issues such consultation with the relevant statutory and institutional stakeholders, namely the Senate for approval purposes and for budget of resources. As shown in chapter one (*cf.* 1.2.2), thorough planning and development processes for new and revised academic programme are guided by an overarching academic plan of the institution that elucidates the university mission, rigorous criteria (*cf.* 1.2.2), distinguishing of programmes characteristics and institutional values that all programmes need to reflect.

The analysis of the results of the literature review, job advertisements and open-ended questionnaire forms the basis of the HR qualities that the labour market needs. The HR qualities and competencies referred to earlier on (*cf.* 5.6), must also be given consideration by HEIs during the curriculum development, programme design and planning, as the HR requirements presented could form the basis on which HEIs could respond to the needs of the broader labour market.

### **6.7.2. Process of programme planning and design for HR programmes at UoTs**

The thrust of the study clearly indicated that students do enter HEIs with the resolute expectation that they will acquire knowledge and competencies, the skills sets, and the abilities to be competent when they enter the workforce after their years of study. Similarly, graduates expect that they will have acquired the skills necessary to perform competently in the labour market and further advance their careers after completion of their studies. On the other hand, in the modern knowledge economy, employers have an expectation that a HEIs will provide graduates with the employability skills required

to perform their jobs to the required standard. This study examined whether HR graduates possess the requisite and basic employability skills sets, competencies and attributes that are needed for job performance and the extent to which those skills are received during the training of HR graduates in HEIs.

In an attempt to respond to the responsiveness of HR programmes as offered by UoTs to respond to the needs of the labour market, it is recommended that the study focuses on the programme planning for HEIs as outlined by Council on Higher Education (CHE). The process of programme planning for HR programmes at UoTs must also take cognisance of the relevant aspects presented in the data analysis chapter, (*cf.* 5.1).

In order to respond adequately to the foregoing assertion, the study considered the programme planning guidelines as depicted on the Programme Accreditation Criteria of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE has the mandate of executing its duties from the Higher Education Act of 1997, and ascribes responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa. This responsibility is further executed by the sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The mandate of the HEQC as a sub-committee of CHE has in turn the duty to execute the role of quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation. The programme planning that will be presented in this section will therefore be understood from the context of CHE guidelines.

The HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation indicates the minimum standards for academic programmes and therefore HR programmes at UoTs must be aligned to meet those standards. The criteria of HEQC are intended to be used by:

- a) Higher education institutions- whenever applications for the accreditation of new programmes or the re-accreditation of existing programmes. Furthermore, this will be used as guidelines for follow-up activities after HEQC decisions on accreditation or re-accreditation of programmes.

- b) The HEQC's programme evaluators in evaluating applications for the accreditation of new programmes or the re-accreditation of existing programmes.
- c) Stakeholders, especially students, as indicators of the minimum standards that the HEQC requires for programme quality.

In terms of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), as mandated by the Council on Higher Education, and in accordance with the Programme Accreditation Criteria, the following contextual imperatives were taken into account when developing programmes:

- National policy for higher education as articulated in a range of government White Papers, legislation, regulations and planning documents.
- The HEQC's own policy positions as laid out in the Founding Document, Programme Accreditation Framework and other policy documents.
- National benchmarks set by the higher education branch of the then Department of Education (DoE) and now renamed Department of Basic Education (DBE) for institutional efficiency, which include increasing enrolments and graduate outputs, increasing research productivity and improving the diversity profile of graduates.
- The institutional quality landscape, which includes varying levels of capacity, as well as the fact that a number of institutions are involved in mergers and incorporations, and in changes of mission, focus or identity, as in the case of comprehensive institutions and universities of technology.
- Partnerships in higher education provision, which include collaboration between and among institutions on a regional basis, between public and private provider sectors, between universities and universities of technology, between higher education institutions and the business sector, and between institutions across national borders.
- Increasing instances of cross-border provision by foreign and South African higher education institutions, as well as the use of new modes of provision.

Therefore, all programmes presented by UoTs must conform to the national requirements pertaining to programmes developed within the context of the NQF. The

revised Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework, which is an integral part of the NQF, stipulates that a programme essentially must be seen as a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences leading to a qualification. Furthermore, programmes may be discipline-based, professional, career-focused, trans-, inter- or multi-disciplinary in nature. A programme has recognised entry and exit points. All programmes that leads to a full qualification and that are offered at HEIs must have a core component and may have a fundamental and or elective component depending on the purpose of the programme or the qualification. The credit allocation for core, fundamental and elective learning will depend on the purpose of the programme or qualification. The internal organisation of programmes is otherwise not prescribed by this document.

The emphasis on programme planning for HR training at UoTs is based on the Programme Accreditation Criteria of CHE and will advance the applicable components of criteria one (1), as its framework. In addition, in implementing the above applicable criteria for HR programmes at UoTs, the study sought to base its on addressing aspects depicted on the Programme Accreditation Criteria of CHE such as:

The emphasis on programme planning for HR training at UoTs is based on the Programme Accreditation Criteria of CHE and will advance the applicable components of criteria one (1), as its framework. In addition, in implementing the above applicable criteria for HR programmes at UoTs, the study sought to base its on addressing aspects depicted on the Programme Accreditation Criteria of CHE such as follows:

*The programme is consonant with the institution's mission, forms part of institutional planning and resource allocation, meets national requirements, the needs of students and other stakeholders, and is intellectually credible. It is designed coherently and articulates well with other relevant programmes, where possible.*

In elucidating the criterion mentioned above, some of the most related and relevant requirements for the programme design will succinctly be presented below. These

criteria that are discussed below are not exhaustive in nature as others could be factored in depending on the view of the researcher.

#### *6.7.2.1. Relation to institution's mission and planning Criterion*

*The programme is consonant with the institution's mission and goals and was approved by the appropriate institutional structures, including Senate/equivalent structure. Provision is made for the programme in the institution's planning and resource allocation processes.*

This implies that the process of programme design must be clearly communicated to all stakeholders within the institution as mentioned above and also take into cognisance the external stakeholders such as government, the industry and business community as the latter are direct beneficiaries of the university programmes. Furthermore, it is pertinent that the mission of the university is supported by well-crafted and informed set of goals and objectives that leads to strategies and plans.

#### *6.7.2.2. Needs of students and other stakeholders*

*The programme meets the national requirements pertaining to programmes which are at present being developed within the context of the NQF.*

In implementing the guidelines of the CHE within the context of the NQF, universities must ensure that the programme is responsive and addresses the core needs of students at the centre of all the processes and planning. In the programme design process thorough analysis of students' needs and nature of learners should be prioritised. This implies that the three main areas of curriculum development, namely standard setting, programme development and delivery and quality assurance must be linked as they relate to each other. The design should encompass the abilities, skills, knowledge, attitudes that students must demonstrate and assessed on.

#### 6.7.2.3. *Intellectual credibility*

*Learning outcomes, degree of curriculum choice, teaching and learning methods, modes of delivery, learning materials and expected completion time cater for the learning needs of its target student intake. Competences expected of students who successfully complete the programme are made explicit.*

The intellectual credibility of the programme must address all the areas mentioned above. Credibility of a programme design for this study is said to be a process that emanates from a fair, valid, and reliable validation and it enhances the quality of a qualification or professional designation. In essence, intellectual credibility of a programme would mean the extent to which the programme meets all the components mentioned above as espoused in Programme Accreditation Criteria of the CHE.

#### 6.7.2.4. *Coherence*

*The design maintains an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills. It has sufficient disciplinary content and theoretical depth, at the appropriate level, to serve its educational purposes.*

Coherence of the programme would refer to a programme that is well organised and structured to properly facilitate both the theoretical, practical and experiential learning, and further ensure a programme that is free of any academic gaps as well as a programme that is aligned to address all lessons in a course. Coherence of a programme must encompass all areas the programme is intended to cover including instructional materials and the techniques applied in delivering the content. In addition, coherence would also encompass issues of how well and to what extent the content is matched with the academic expectation as prescribed in learning materials. This means coherence covers all the elements that are entailed in imparting knowledge to students and this includes all types of assessments.

#### 6.7.2.5. *Articulation*

Articulation refers to connectivity of learning that creates seamless learning throughout the students' experience and exposure. This entails progression of learning in an

educational system right through the completion and attainment of a qualification. Furthermore, articulation is a pertinent process that involves working in a team environment that allows teachers, lecturers and tutors to collaboratively plan and implement the curriculum in ways that enhance the intended articulation. In this process, facilitators of learning need to plan to take time and plan curriculum thoroughly, develop assessments and criteria, enhance strategies and robustly engage in collaborative reviews with the sole purpose of improving the students' work and quality.

#### 6.7.2.6. *Learning materials development*

*Learning outcomes, degree of curriculum choice, teaching and learning methods, modes of delivery, learning materials and expected completion time cater for the learning needs of its target student intake. Competences expected of students who successfully complete the programme are made explicit.*

The quality and the accessibility to learning materials as resources are equally important. The quality of learning resources is determined by whether they support students in achieving the expected learning outcomes.

In addition to the HEQC's criteria specified above, CHE guidelines for programme design requires to comply with the following national requirements that conforms to the NQF:

- In the case of public providers, the programme must be part of the institution's programme and qualification mix (PQM), as approved by the DoE.
- In the case of private providers, the institution must apply to the DoE for registration in terms of the requirements of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 and the Regulations of the Department of Education (2002), before the programme is provisionally accredited for the candidacy phase.
- The programme has to meet the national requirements pertaining to programmes which are at present being developed within the context of the NQF.
- The programme should be registered by SAQA on the NQF.

- The stipulations of the Labour Relations Act and conditions of service with regard to recruitment and employment of staff.
- Relevant labour legislation and regulations on health and safety in the workplace.

Given the guidelines provided above, it is clearly imperative that HR programme to be reviewed in order to ensure relevance and responsiveness with regard to the expectation of the labour market. This is more crucial as HR is concerned with managing people within organisations. As a result, HR professionals need to be seen as adding value for the organisation and positive work experiences for individuals. The HR programmes need to cover content knowledge in all the areas mentioned above, and further impart skills and capabilities necessary for HR graduates to be effective practitioners within their organisations.

Programme planning is further essential in that it will enable HR programme design and curriculum processes to assess the need and improve on the role of HR in an organisational setting. The programme planning and design guidelines discussed in the foregoing sections would further help and place the HR function in a better position in terms of assessing the need of the labour market, designing of relevant materials to support HR programme at the university level as well as the implementation thereof.

### **6.7.3. Organisation of the academic programme**

Programme design is essentially seen as considering factors such as how a programme is organised with a viewpoint of enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes – implying the student workload, volume and nature of assessment, progression through the programme, and increasing intellectual demand. The crucial four-step that includes teaching practical skills that displays demonstration, deconstruction, explanation and performance are strongly put forward for consideration by HEIs (*cf.* 4.2). Higher education providers determine the appropriate balance between factors such as practical and academic study, modes and location of study, the use of technology, directed and independent learning, breadth and depth of subject content, and opportunities for personal and academic development. Programme approval processes ensure that the programme as a whole is coherent in terms of its logic in structure and intellectual integrity, and that assessment methods

are aligned with the programme content, learning outcomes, and learning and teaching activities (constructive alignment).

As with any educational programme, it is imperative for HR programmes to be designed on a well-researched curricular base. The impetus should be the focus on responsiveness to the needs of the world of work. In addition, well-designed HR programmes that focus on sustenance of quality standards, have great potential to ensure that the higher education institutions that offers the programmes in the HR profession earn the respect and confidence of the industry (Swanepoel, Erasmus, van Wyk & Schenk, 2000). As a result, a well-researched curriculum should inform a well-rounded programme that produces well equipped and prepared students (Swanepoel *et al.*, 2000). Therefore, HR programmes are also bound to consider the needs of the labour market, in order to be considered as adding value to organisations – especially in the current turbulent and volatile economic situation.

#### **6.7.4. Contemporary HR curricula and programmes**

In investigating the HR competencies and skills sets as well as relevant attributes, the study attempted to reveal the fundamental factors that should be considered in the curriculum development of HR programmes. The study sought to provide a reliable and clear source of HR qualities that should be considered for relevant learning to be imparted to students. In this study, it has become apparent that the HR curricula and programme have a crucial role to play in preparing students for the world of work. This implies that one of the functions of a curriculum is to provide a template or design – which enables learning to take place. The study also purports to define HR curricula that defines the learning that is expected to take place during a course or programme of study – in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In the search for more knowledge and understanding of both the HR curriculum and programme content, it has been found that the research tools that were used for investigating the needs of the labour market played a significant role in terms of getting the perceptions of the world of work. The research instruments used in the study were the literature review, content or document analysis as well as the open-ended questionnaire. The data that emanated from the investigation and interpreted in chapter five, became key in terms of the transfer of knowledge, competencies and expertise in HR education. A succinct account of the curricula in HR education is presented below.

Furthermore, in this study, the context in which the concept of a curriculum is understood to be based on the fact that a curriculum comprises the content that a particular educational programme offers to students at different levels of education. In addition, the curriculum is normally set according to certain standards – in accordance with the requirements of the profession and as verified by external bodies such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Therefore, the curriculum must demonstrate the appropriate and relevant content that a programme in any discipline should impart to a student.

*If a curriculum in higher education is understood to be an educational vehicle to promote a student's development, and if a curriculum in higher education is also understood to be built in large part around a project of knowledge, then the issue arises as to the links between knowledge and student being and becoming (cf. 2.4).*

The above argument of Barnett (2009) suggests that any programme of learning needs to be informed by a well-researched curriculum that forms the basis for a good programme with relevant and responsive content that in turn response positively to the student advancement and development. The contention again in the latter statement elucidates the fact that good curricula should be seen as the basis for relevant knowledge, competencies and expertise in a student and graduate. In chapter two (cf. 2.4) it is argued that relevant learning begins with a curriculum content that shapes the mind of any university student, to have the capacity to contribute meaningfully in the world of work. It is clear that the higher education community is being challenged to consider a constant review or revision of the curricula, given the impetus for a swift pace in the evolution of disciplines like HR.

In the literature review chapter it is clearly indicated that there is a significant indication that a good curriculum is an integral tool that plays a significant part in forging both academic and lifelong competencies. Furthermore, a well-researched curriculum displays sought-after competencies such as knowledge, skills and attitudes in a particular setting.

As is the trend with other educational programmes from various disciplines, HR education curricula and programmes are bound to change – with the primary aim of being responsive to the critical needs of the world of work. Thus the HEIs need to consider this. The enormous paradigm shift in the manner in which the HR profession used to offer service to organisations, has made it prudent for the higher education fraternity to also consider advancing HR education via both the revamped, updated curricula and new appropriate programmes that respond to the needs of the labour market. The study has demonstrated this aspect of the paradigm shift by exposing the most needed and needed skills and competencies for the HR profession. Kuchinke, as cited in Madsen, Musto and Hall (n.d.) states that in “*responding to the increasing demand for employee skills, expertise, and performance in rapidly changing economic and social environments, many universities have implemented academic programs to educate and train ... practitioners ...*”. This implies that it is essential for HEIs to implement advanced education that has well-informed HR curricula in place. In the literature chapter (*cf.* 2.4) guidelines that institutions and organisations should plan to update a curriculum – to draw upon the model that emphasised the student involvement, and is presented as:

- 1) A curriculum must have practitioner or student input in it.
- 2) A curriculum must ensure adoption of creative approaches to student learning.
- 3) A curriculum must ensure the development of specific measurable outcomes.
- 4) A curriculum should always observably demonstrate the learning of clearly spelt out outcomes.
- 5) Curriculum developers should always ensure the creation of knowledge that is grounded in resolving real-world business problems.

The above five-step process is recommended for consideration by HEIs. As a result, it is fundamental for faculties to direct adequate university resources to ensure the redesigning of curricula and programmes on a continuous basis – to keep up with the changing needs of organisations and student preparedness. It cannot be further emphasised that the new HR curriculum should be designed so that it identifies opportunities and options for teaching HR content areas, skills and business issues within the confines of what the world of work demands. The most fundamental aim of

the study hinges on the illustrative framework on contemporary competencies and skills that the designers of curricula and programmes in HR must take into account, since they are perceived to be relevant by the labour market. HR competencies that the labour market identified and visualised as being fundamental are depicted in a framework in chapter five (Figure 5.2). Future HR professionals should be prepared in such a way that they can cope with the workplace challenges at both strategic and operational levels. According to SHRM (2013), recent research around the HR competency models indicates the critical challenges of the HR profession – since there are other forces associated with the war for talent and competition and these developments have a direct influence on curriculum design. Therefore, the quest for HR curriculum development, with specific concentration on content review and updates, is essential.

## **6.8. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

The limitations of the study are discussed below:

### **6.8.1. Literature review**

- a) The main challenge with using literature as a method of data gathering was that the method relied heavily on previously published research which lacked appropriateness on specific HR competencies and skills set except the information gathered via HR competency models.
- b) The literature review lacked insightful information and comprehensive research on the link and established collaboration with organisations in pursuit of skills and competencies that the labour market perceived as fundamental for HR graduates after the study period.

### **6.8.2. Document analysis based on HR job advertisements**

- a) The job websites like [www.careers24.com](http://www.careers24.com), [www.hireresolve.co.za](http://www.hireresolve.co.za) and [www.pnet.co.za](http://www.pnet.co.za) may not have sourced sufficient data; other media could have been useful in terms of getting rich information.
- b) It became extremely time consuming to derive meaningful content using this method.

- c) In general, document analysis could be pose a challenge of being obsolete and at times not the information sought may not be easily traced.
- d) The other challenge with document analysis is that documents may not have been written for the same purpose as the research.
- e) A major challenge with the document analysis (job advertisements) is that it is limited by availability of material.
- f) The other limitation of documents as source of data was that they are non-interactive and nonreactive, namely that with documents meanings cannot be asked nor checked for elaboration on a certain aspect of uncertainty.
- g) The study found that there is insider perspective on the document and interpretations were found to be not open for rebuttal.

### **6.8.3. Open-ended questionnaire**

- a) The participant response rate yielded by the questionnaire, in light of the targeted population, made it possible for the study to insinuate informed inferences. As a result, the data collected and conclusions reached were therefore interpreted in the light of a significant number of respondents.
- b) Given the scope of this study, probing deeper into finding relevant HR competencies and skills sets and knowledge that matches various levels of HR professionals, namely from entry level to the executive level.
- c) Targeted respondents were approached via their email addresses, through Survey Monkey as a data collection technique for administering the open-ended questionnaire.
- d) Other sources such as telephonic conversations, and visits would have helped with gathering more data.
- e) Targeted respondents with email addresses that bounced back could not provide information or participate in the research – even though means were done to try and locate their new email addresses for them to answer the open-ended questionnaire.
- f) The other shortcoming of applying the open-ended questionnaire was that senior managers delegated junior staff members to complete the questionnaire, and this led to vague and uninformed responses provided.

- g) Some respondents commented that questions within the dimension of the strategic focus were a matter of interpretation since strategy exists at different levels of an organisation. As a result, other questions were not answered in full.
- h) A few respondents also commented that it was difficult to answer questions, since they never applied to their particular operational purview.
- i) Even though the questionnaire was pre-tested and adjusted and widely discussed, there were areas where respondents could not grasp what was required of them.

## **6.9. CONCLUSION**

Human resource management has a significant role to play in assisting organisations achieve their strategic goals and objectives. The objectives of the study and related questions were the main means that enabled it to pull together the most needed HR qualities of the labour market and perhaps the HEIs in terms of considering the possibility of tapping into HR competencies and skills sets and the attributes that could go into curricula and programmes (*cf* 1.5.2). Moreover, the study made every attempt to present sufficient evidence that implied that the field of HR has evolved significantly over the past two to three decades (*cf* 2.2). This is evidenced by the evolution of the field from the industrial era that then led to the early periods of personnel management, human resource management, and recently strategic human resource management (*cf* 2.3.1). The other evidence on HR evolution was heavily premised around the development of HR competency models. A few HR competency models and the South African own-developed model introduced by the SABPP, bear testimony to the significant evolution and major trends that took in place in the field and profession of human resource management (*cf* 3.1).

The analysis related to the required HR competencies and skills sets and attributes led to the conclusion that there is a challenge posed to HEIs in terms of leading in the transformation of curricula and programme planning – in order to be responsive to the needs of the labour market and to ensure appropriate preparedness of HR students via quality and responsive training. Thus, the training of HR graduates and the development of HR professionals is an area that needs strategic focus in any organisation.

Furthermore, the analysis related to the section of the study in chapter five (*cf* 5.3) also clearly suggests that there is much that the labour market expects from HR

graduates and professionals, and that provides much scope for higher education to explore. HEIs may as well put more focus on trying to understand the needs of the labour market and cement this by forging academic cooperation and partnerships – while universities, given autonomy-related issues, need to pursue research and create knowledge without any interruption of any kind.

Finally, HR has a wide scope for further research in terms of the evolving competencies and skills sets and relevant attributes that need to be included in university curricula and programmes. There is also a need for researchers to look into the question of whether the competencies found in various HR competency models could generally be regarded as “*one size fits all*” or whether different levels of HR professionals need different sets of competencies to be included in HR curricula and programmes.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

### a) Open-ended Questionnaire

#### BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please Tick (x) whichever is applicable

Respondent Gender	Male		Female	
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Indicate your highest academic qualification and the field of study:

Please provide information on your experience in the area HR:

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) As an experienced HR employer –please indicate what you regard as those essential/fundamental competencies that characterize a ‘good’ or an ‘ideal’ HR professional.


- 2) As an employer of HR employees, which personal attributes do you think are essential and needed when recruiting a new person in an HR vacancy?

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- 3)** When recruiting new employees, the company/organization follows a process to enable the selection of appropriate candidate(s). Please explain the various steps in the process and which key factors you like to 'use' to identify the best candidate for the position.


- 4)** Please elaborate more and also indicate why you prefer the key factors mentioned above.


- 5)** As manager/executive of your organization you are often required to make new appointments. In some instances, these employees graduated from a higher education institution recently (within the last three to five years) and have very little or no experience in the HR environment. Please reflect on your experiences of these newly appointed HR graduates.


- 6) Please provide more information about the above referred HR graduates' ability to perform in the workplace, the applicability of their competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes and their ability to fulfil a key role in Human Resources practices in the organization.


- 7) If you had to contribute to the training and development of human resource professionals, what would be the three most important competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes be that you would add to enrich an HR graduates' training programme.


- 8) Please explain why you say the above mentioned competencies and skills sets, knowledge and attributes are essential.

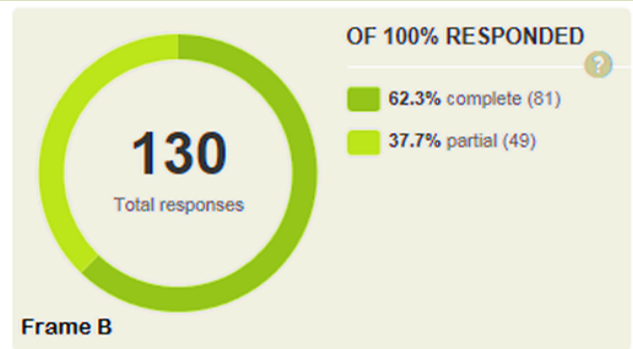
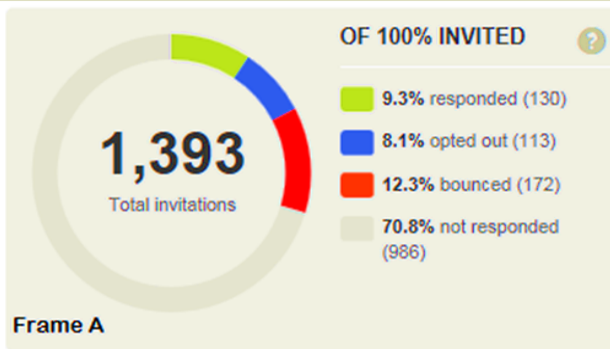

## b) Data collection period

	NICKNAME	STATUS	RESPONSES	DATE MODIFIED
✉	21/05/2013 Created 5/21/2013	CLOSED	130	Monday, June 24, 2013 5:00 PM

## c) Message History (During data collection process)

### OVERVIEW OF DATA ANALYSIS

21/05/2013



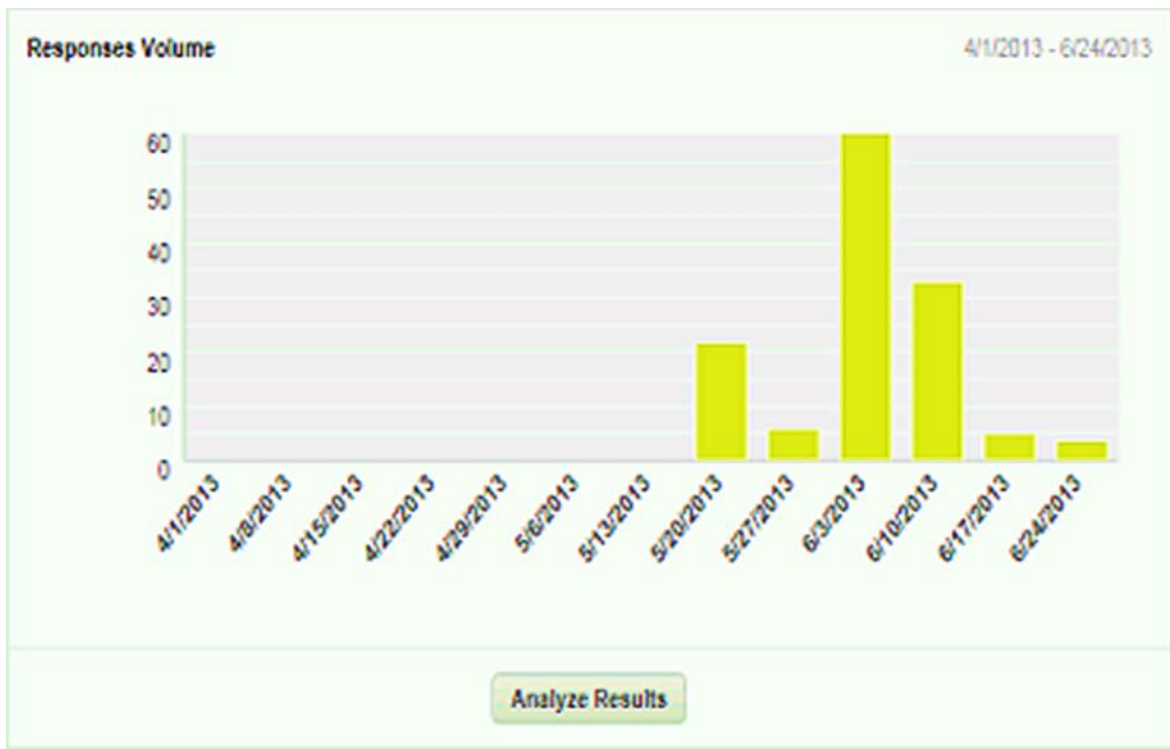
#### HISTORY OF MESSAGES SENT TO REMIND THE EMPLOYER COMMUNITY

6/24/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,007 contacts
6/21/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,017 contacts
6/19/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,031 contacts
6/14/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/14/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,050 contacts
6/13/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/12/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,081 contacts
6/10/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/10/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,102 contacts
6/10/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts

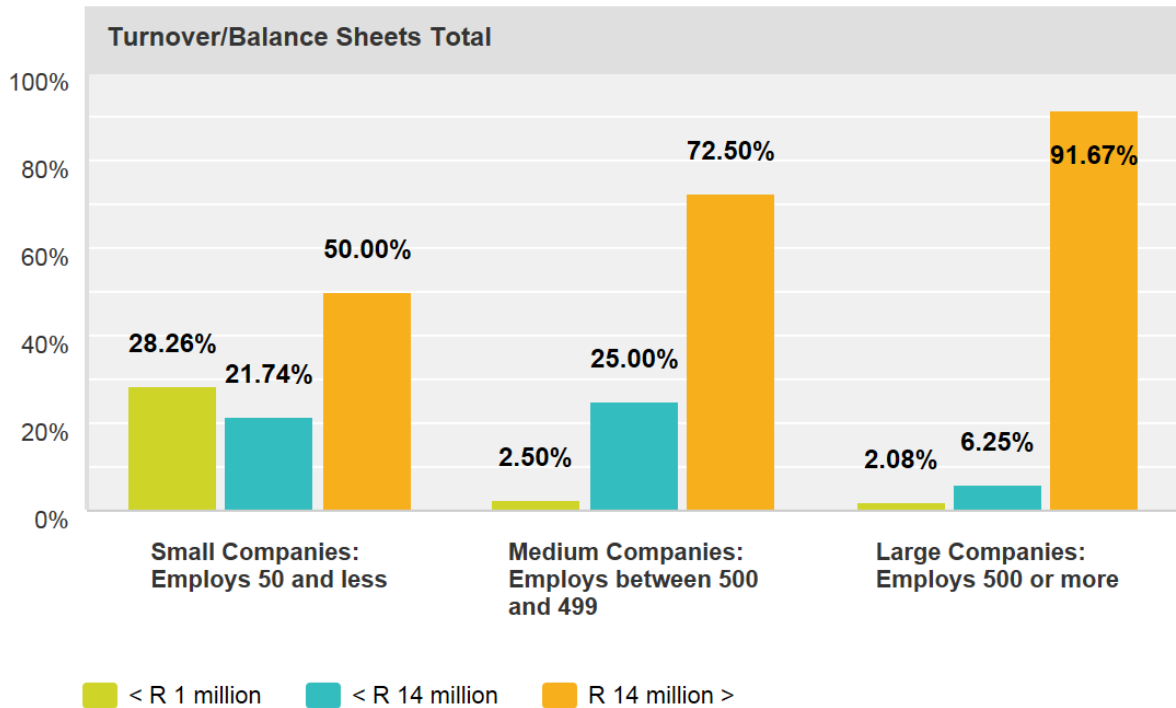
## HISTORY OF MESSAGES SENT TO REMIND THE EMPLOYER COMMUNITY (CONTINUATION)

6/7/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/7/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,120 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent invitation message to 47 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent invitation message to 2 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,100 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent invitation message to 0 contacts
6/5/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,119 contacts
6/4/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
6/3/2013	Sent reminder message to 1,152 contacts
5/30/2013	Sent invitation message to 1 contacts
5/24/2013	Sent invitation message to 25 contacts
5/21/2013	Sent invitation message to 1,312 contacts

**d) Responses volume (Survey Questionnaire)**



**e) Turnover/ Balance Sheets Total of various organisations that participated in the study**



**a) Consent Letter (as sent to participants with questions)**

Dear Participants

It would be appreciated if you could take some time to complete this questionnaire. All information given will be treated as strictly confidential and will only be reported on when collated. Also ensure that no names will be attached, and you are also welcome to withdraw from the research and that the final version will be feedback to the participants to ensure that it does not contain any info that might implicate you as a participant in the research process.

Your voluntary participation in this study is invaluable.