

The Dutch Dave Ulrich
Myths and facts about the daily reality of HRM

Paper for 10th Biennial International Conference of the Dutch HRM Network
9 & 10 November 2017

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INTRODUCTION

For many decades, the role and position of HR professionals has been critically discussed because the profession is undergoing rapid change due to globalisation, automation and reduction of the HR department. But what actually happens in the workplace of the HR professional? The past four years, more than 1500 students and researchers from six universities worked together to identify the changes in the daily routine of the HR professional. The results seem surprising: the daily routine of the HR professional develops differently than expected according to recent trade publications

Four years ago the Avans University of Applied Sciences published the results from the first round of multiple years of research on the daily routine of HR Professionals in the following magazine (Woering & Van Dartel, 2014). This research exhibited the following; (1) the HR professional has the responsibility to carry out a wide range of activities, both through execution and forming policies; (2) greater appeal to the competency area 'management of change' in comparison to the competency area 'business knowledge' where the least allure is (3) the role of HR as middle ground between management and floor workers is still crucially important (4) HRM increasingly proceeds to function via the boundaries.

At present, now four years later, a total of five other Universities of Applied Sciences have joined the research project. The question is: what has changed over the last few years in the daily routine of the HR Professional? On the basis of the large scale survey of more than 4,000 HR professionals, HR executives and line managers, in this article we describe the development of the HR professional in practice between the years of 2012 and 2016. We have achieved this through the following research questions;

- According to HR professionals what are the most important developments in the HR field?
- How is the HR department of the organisation characterised by HR professionals, HR executives and line managers?
- Which HR activities do HR professionals engage in?
- Which competencies are used in the implementation of the HR activities?
- What is the role division of HR activities between HR professionals and line management?
- What factors influence line management to adequately carry out HR activities?

We begin the article by presenting findings reported in the literature on the activities and competencies of the HR professional and the theory on which our research is based. Next, we describe the design of the study and the developments in the daily routine of the HR professional. We finish with the conclusions of this study for both the HR practice and education in HRM.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE HR PROFESSIONAL

In recent years a strong foundation has formed in regard to the development of the work of the HR professional, with gratitude to a large-scale one year research investigation conducted by Ulrich concerning the competence and activities of the HR professional of over 90,000 HR professionals (Ulrich, 2008; 2012; 2016). Ulrich describes this development in four stages, which he calls 'developmental waves of HR'

The first stage emphasizes the administrative work of HR: HR professionals are focused on working conditions, delivering HR services and regulatory compliance. HR is mainly a 'administrative and transactional service. As long as HR consistently and cost-effectively delivers the groundwork (salary is paid correctly, the administration is properly implemented), only then within this stage is HR seen as a department that performs well.

The second stage affirms the development of innovative HR practices for recruitment, compensation and rewards, learning, communication, and so forth. This concerns the search for renewed innovative approaches for these HR practices as well as finding and implementing the best practices. A HR professional is successful in this second stage when he/she is able to innovate HR practice and is familiar with manners in which to connect the various HR practices with each other.

The third stage is concerned with strategic HRM, abbreviated to SHRM. SHRM is directed at the consistent union between organisational strategy and HR activity. At this stage, an important goal of the HR professional is to ensure contribution to the strategic agenda of the organisation.

The fourth stage is described as 'R from the outside in'. This stage goes beyond traditional strategic HRM. The central focus in this stage is on the effect that the work of HR has on the environment of the company, its customers and stakeholders.

Currently, many HR professionals are transitioning from the third development stage (strategic HRM) to the fourth development stage (HR from the outside in). Simultaneously, HR administration must be flawless, HR practices should still be innovative and integrated and HR needs to translate strategic ambitions into HR actions. The HR professional should along with these prerequisites act according to an 'outside-in' approach: HR monitors the environment of the organisation and the interests of customers and investors and translates these to HR activities. HRM is consequently highly externally oriented (Ulrich, 2012).

Actions of the HR Professional

Although the stage that the HR profession finds itself in will differ per organisation and even per HR professional, the work of a HR professional can be characterized in seven clusters of HR activities (Woering & Van Frisky, 2014). This classification is based on, amongst other things, research by Biemans (2008) on the tasks of the HR professional and will be central in this study (see Table 1).

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	<i>HR Activity Clusters</i>	<i>Activities</i>
1	Resourcing/Availability	Budgeting, staff planning, recruitment, dismissal procedures and redundancy plan
2	Employability /Personnel development	Establish and implement competencies management, advising, on HRM cycle conversations, career and training meetings, management development
3	Organisational development	Support in reorganisation , support cultural change, support team development , help shape organisational strategy
4	Working conditions	Drafting employment schemes, employment application and advice, recommend remuneration issues
5	Health, absenteeism and vitality	Advice on health and safety issues, absenteeism at facilitating, preparing and facilitating risk identification and evaluation (RI & E)
6	Industrial Relations	Consultation with (members) works council, facilitate team meetings, mediation and advise in conflicts, internal communication
7	Staff Management	Personnel management information systems, performing personnel administration tasks, perform payroll preparation and reporting of personnel information.

Competencies of the HR Professional

What are the competencies of the HR professional? Ulrich (2016) describes nine competencies through which HR professionals deliver added value to organisations. Firstly the three basic competencies that a HR professional must possess in order to act effectively; the 'strategic positioner,' the 'credible activist' and the 'paradox navigator'. Secondly, there are three skills that are necessary for HR professionals to possess in order to be of strategic value to the organisation: the 'culture and change champion 'the human capital curator' and 'total reward steward'. Thirdly, three competencies that HR professionals need at a tactical level value are: the 'technology and media integrator', the 'analytics designer and interpreter' and the 'compliance manager'. In Table 2, each of these skills will be briefly explained.

<i>Competencies</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Basic Competencies</i>	
Credible activist	The HR professional is able to build a relationship of trust and respect with organisation and has proactive contact with various internal and external stakeholders.
Strategic positioner	The HR professional is capable of evaluating both the internal and external and then translate it into effective HR practices for a successful organisation
Paradox navigator	The HR professional is capable of dealing with conflicting situations.
<i>Competencies at a strategic level</i>	

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Culture and change champion	The HR professional contributes to shaping the culture as well as encourages managing change.
Human Capital Curator	HR professionals ensure an effective workforce and personnel planning
Total Stewards Reward	The HR professional needs to be able to design compensation systems.
<i>Competencies at a tactical level</i>	
Compliance manager	The HR professional must be able to manage legal guidelines (national and international).
Analytics designer and interpreter	The HR professional must be able to identify and interpret data in order to decisions into force.
Technology en media integrator	HR professionals will be able to use smart technology tools to connect em and to contribute to a successful organization.

In Ulrich's research, there are currently new competencies being added to the tactical level. It is due to this that the competence in relation to technology and media integrator is only visible in the last review of results. In this research we have in the first instance limited ourselves to the strategic level competencies of the HR professional, wherefrom Biemans has assured that these are relevant for effective HR professionals within the Netherlands.

1. Personal integrity (comparable to 'credible activist' manner of handling confidential information, ability to listen, reliability, accuracy and integrity);
2. Management by change (comparable to "culture and change champion") process management, implementation, knowledge, and problem solving;
3. Business knowledge (comparable to "strategic positioner"); business management and information technology aspects, as well as strategic skills, and organisational processes;
4. Leading power (comparable to "credible activist") leadership and persuasion;
5. HR General Expertise (similar to the various tactical and strategic competencies of Ulrich such as the "compliance manager" and the "human capital curator"): legal knowledge, application of policies and instruments, understanding of processes.

HRM in Line Management

Many HR activities are not carried out by HR professionals but instead by line management. This is crucial, because it is in fact the line managers that have direct contact with the employees, and can therefore have direct influence on the daily routine of employees in working practice.

There are five factors associated with line managers being able to and wanting to successfully implement HR policies. These are as follows;

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1. Competencies: Line managers should possess HR related competencies (knowledge and skills) in order to (partly) implement HR practices
2. Motivation: Line managers have to want to implement HR practices;
3. Time: Line managers need to have the time to implement HR practices;
4. Support from HR: line managers require good support from HR in implementing and executing;
5. Policies and procedures: Line managers should have clarity concerning the policies, guidelines and procedures. This refers not only to the level of responsibility and authority, but also to the instruments available in the implementation procedure.

Future of HRM

There has been a lot of discussion in relation to the future of the HR profession in the last couple of decades. The following developments have been identified in these discussions;

1. The increase of organisational strategic influence of the HR profession. In particular, the growing importance of data analytics is mentioned as a crucial development for achieving powerful and evidence-based decision making (Angrave et al, 2016; & Bondarouk Van den Heuvel, 2016).
2. The growing importance of sustainable employability and human resource development for the HR profession through work that is changing ever faster due to technological advances, globalisation and changing business models of organisations. Employees need to be challenged and galvanised to operate in rapidly changing environments and career prospects. That requires quite a lot of skills on the employees behalf, as they must, for example, be proactive and flexible, and work increasingly more through self-steering (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Van Est & Cabbage, 2015). This befits the increasing focus on talent management as an important issue (Gallardo Gallardo, Dries & González-Cruz, 2013 Thun Nissen Boselie & Fruytier, 2013).
3. The increasing automisation of HR activities and the growing importance of smart use of technology by the HR professional. Ulrich (2012) describes the smart use of technology as knowledge to connect employees, and as such critical skill for today's HR professional. Moreover, the automation of HR work itself becomes visible to an increasing extent, and consequently the work is shifting from operational HRM to strategic and tactical HRM.

The studies include Ulrich (2008; 2012; 2016) and Biemans (2008) which provide valuable insight into the development, role and competencies of the HR professional. We know therefore what the competencies of an effective HR professional should be, what the role of the HR professional is and additionally information about the relevant developments in the field of HR. This being said, there is a lack of good understanding of what the research and findings mean for the the daily activities of the HR Professional of HR professionals: what do they spend their time on? What do line managers do and what skills are being called upon? The earlier research by Woering and Van Frisky (2014) provides some insight into these questions and within this article these insights are further explored

upon by looking at the development of the daily routine of the HR professional over the past four years and by examining the explanations for developments.

METHOD

The lecturers from the HRM lecturer-network have designed a research instrument called the 'HRM monitor' to enable students to question the member colleagues, HR professionals, HR managers and line managers about the daily routine of HRM (Woering & Van Frisky, 2014). The HRM monitor consists of a digital survey which students use at a company they are currently involved with, for example for an internship as part of their studies or as a final thesis research position. After the results have been processed by an external research board, the student receives the answers from the digital survey and on the basis of the results, can hold an in-depth interview with the HR professional, HR manager and line manager. A structured interview protocol, by function-group has been developed in order to retrieve further answers from the digital survey and to provide more context. For the students the research holds three major advantages: they learn how to conduct research, to examine the subject of HR professionals from multiple viewpoints and to discuss developments in the profession of the HR professional.

Content of the survey instrument

The survey instrument was developed on the basis of the previously mentioned theories and insights from the literature (see Biemans, 2008; Forest Nehles et al, 2011; Ulrich, 2008). Using a questionnaire composed of closed questions, HR professionals, as well as HR executives and line managers were asked about various HR topics.

Firstly, it was asked what they believe to be the most important developments in the HR field. Respondents could make a selection from a list of fifteen HR issues (including organisational development, attracting qualified personnel, diversity policies) and tick up to three choices.

Secondly, respondents were asked to characterise the HR department. They needed to use a four-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = strongly agree) to determine the extent to which they characterise their HR department with the following descriptions:

1. Developing vision and strategy in the field of HRM;
2. Are co-responsible for the realisation of change;
3. Respond to personnel matters / issues that come their way;
4. Designing and delivering HR products and services;
5. Staff care (help and support staff);
6. Resource management (administer and control).

Thirdly, the survey asked for the time dedicated to various HR activities. Respondents were to use a four-point scale (1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, 4 = large extent) to reveal how much time they spend on HR activities listed in Table 1.

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Fourthly, respondents gauged the required competencies. Using a four-point scale (1 = almost never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, 4 = high degree) HR professionals and HR executives indicated the extent to which they use the five aforementioned areas of competencies based on Biemans (2008) in their daily work.

Fifthly, the survey asked whose responsibility it is to implement HR tasks. Following a five-point scale, respondents were questioned to what extent the implementation of the HR activities from Table 1 is the responsibility of the HR department or the line manager (1 = totally in HR; 2 = largely on HR; 3 = joint responsibility; 4 = largely at the line; 5 = completely in the line).

Finally, it was asked to which extent line management is successful in implementing the HR tasks used by Forest Nehles et al (2011) Mentioned factors: motivation, enough time for HR related skills, support from the HR department and clear rules and procedures.

Subsequently, during the in-depth interviews, the above mentioned HR issues were more comprehensively questioned in order to provide greater clarity and to bring the figures and explanations for trends to light.

Participants

The research was initiated in 2012 by a university of applied sciences. Since 2014, six additional universities of applied sciences have become affiliated with the HR monitor research project and thus the number of students employed, range of organisations and respondents has increased (see table 3). The data was collected in four different rounds. In total 1,354 companies participated in the survey, of which 59 companies could cooperate twice and 14 companies cooperated three times. 63% of companies can be characterised as large and 37% as medium & small enterprises (companies with 250 or fewer employees).

	No. of Universities of applied sciences	No. Companies	No. of questioned HR Professionals	No. of questioned HR managers	No. of questioned Line managers
Round 1: 2012-2013	1	106	106	58	63
Round 2: 2013-2014	5	251	251	160	179
Round 3: 2014-2015	6	514	426	414	395
Round 4: 2015-2016	6	544	571	553	542

In total, the four rounds delivered a number of 1,783 participating students in the data collection. The average response rates over four years for HR professionals, HR executives and line managers are, respectively, 76%, 65% and 68%.

Analysis method

Due to the fact that the focus of this study is on the development of the HR profession over time, it is important to determine whether the respondents from the four survey rounds (cohorts) are comparable to each other. Therefore, we have identified different background variables of HR professionals, HR managers and line managers using the ANOVA analysis (organisation size, age, years of service, years of experience in the current function and span of control for HR executives and line managers) and Chi - Quadrant Analyses (industry and education) from the various rounds and used these to draw a comparison. The analysis showed that between the four different rounds the (demographic) variables of the respondents are not significantly different from each other, with the exception of sector. The question of branches is also included as a control variable in the subsequent analyses. It should also be noted that the respondents to the first survey round differ from other associates in terms of geographical spread since the first survey round was only composed of cooperating students from one university that participated in the research.

The results from the first question concerning the most important developments in the HR field were analysed by comparing the percentages of the responses throughout the various groups. The results from the other questions, namely typical HR department activities, time dedication, required competencies, allocation of tasks between HR and line management, and preconditions for successful task performance by the line manager were analysed by a mixture of ANOVA. The answers to the different HR themes were included as between group variables, the different rounds/cohorts (1-4) as a within group variable and the branch is defined as a covariate. This analysis examined whether there are main effects of the different HR themes and whether there are developments over time with respect to the HR theme (interaction effect HR theme x round/cohort). Subsequently, post hoc t-tests were used to assess specific differences. In the results, we only include the differences that were found to be significant. The justification of this is reflected in the attached tables. In addition, further qualitative analysis was done with interviews with HR professionals, HR executives and line managers, which student researchers have made transcripts of.

RESULTS

Key developments HR field

HR professionals, HR managers and line managers are properly aligned when it comes to what they see as important developments in the HR field (see Figure 1). According to them, organisational development is the most important HR issue.. This is mainly in relation to supporting organisational restructuring, culture change management and team development. Further analysis showed that the importance of the organisational development issues decreased over time, especially for HR professionals: in 2012 63% of HR professionals found this issue important when in 2016 it fell to 40%. One explanation for this can be found in the supplementary interviews. There it concluded that in previous years, about half of HR professionals were involved in supporting reorganisations, a number that dropped to a third in the last year. The commitment to culture change management and team development is relatively stable over time.

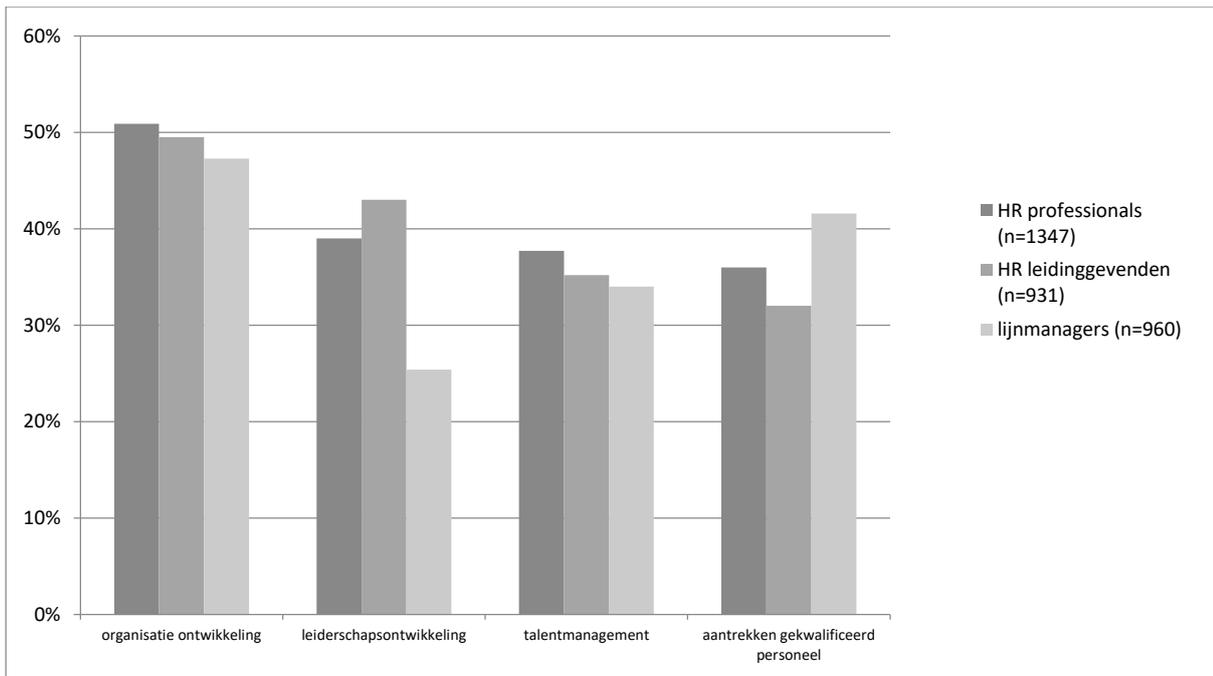
Leadership development is often cited as an important current HR issue, with HR professionals and HR managers often naming this theme over that of line managers. A HR professional comments the following in regard to this: *‘in the past few years there has been an increasing focus on the internal aspect, such as quality of management. HR has taken initiative for training leadership and communication for all managers. Within our organisation these skills have never been trained’*.

Another issue, namely talent management is often mentioned by HR professionals, HR managers and line managers as key to HR development. A HR professional:

‘The stimulation of talent development and the development of talents, are to me a very important theme. A big challenge for us is to retain talents in our organization’

Finally, attracting sufficiently qualified staff is high on the agenda as an important HR theme, for line managers even more so than for HR professionals and HR managers. A HR professional explained: ‘That we notice is that the labour market has changed a lot. The crisis made it easier to get staff, but now it is a lot more difficult. Connecting and appealing are therefore very central to our organisation’.

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The interviewers also asked HR professionals and HR managers what they see as the key challenges in the next four years. The following four challenges were named frequently:

1. The employability and vital retention of young and older workers. According to respondents, this challenge will increase sharply in the coming years as a result of increasingly rapid changes in work, for example, ageing and legislation regarding longer working years. A HR professional puts it as follows: *'The time has passed where an employee can get away with doing the same trick. The responsibility for him/her to continue to develop oneself is a joint responsibility of employer and employee'*.

2. Training and development: HR development and talent management are named as increasingly important challenges. Organisations, according to the HR managers in particular, are in an ever changing environment and employees need to change with the environment in order to ensure organisations are manageable and maintainable.

3. Digitisation and automation lead to many challenges for the HR professional's work. Not only will e-HRM systems gain an ever-increasing important role, but also the HR professionals will have to respond to key developments with smart technology, such as knowledge management and learning and development. A HR professional declared: *'he most important challenge is the digitisation of HRM (...) which has been automated in the past few years, the 'bottom' of HRM, such as personnel administration, will be used by our department in the coming years, for example in online learning and collaboration tools'*.

Characterisation of the HR Dpartment

Both HR professionals and HR managers consider the design and delivery of HR products and services, as well as the co-responsibility for realising change processes, as the key components of

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their department (see Table 4). Line managers, on the other hand, characterise the HR department as typically focused on 'personnel management' and 'human resource management'.

Thus, we see here that HR professionals have a different view of their department in comparison to line management: HRMs put more emphasis on the strategic side of their field whereas line managers seem to be drawn to the more classic view that the HR department is in particular engaged with HR tasks at the operational level.

However, further analysis shows that HR professionals in the past two years have classed their organisation less strongly when characterising it as 'co-responsible for realising change processes'. The same goes for developing 'vision and strategy in the field of HR'. However, with HR managers, we see an opposite development: they increasingly characterise the HR department as directed at HR strategy and supportive of change processes.

This shows that not only HR professionals and line management differ in perception of the HR department's characterisation, but in the HR department there is also a difference in opinion between HR professionals and HR managers. In the next section focused on the time allocation of HR professionals and HR managers, we will look into this phenomenon more and try to explain this development.

	HR professional ¹					HR manager ²					Line manager ³				
	year 1 (n=103)	year 2 (n=240)	year 3 (n=376)	year 4 (n=423)	total (n=1147)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=153)	year 3 (n=390)	year 4 (n=537)	total (n=1137)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=153)	year 3 (n=390)	year 4 (n=537)	total (n = 1186)
Development HR strategy	3.07 ^{ab}	3.16 ^b	2.91 ^a	2.93 ^a	2.98*	2.63 ^a	2.59 ^a	2.95 ^b	2.99 ^b	2.91^y	2.52 ^a	2.48 ^a	2.64 ^{ab}	2.73 ^b	2.65^z
Support change management	3.21 ^{ab}	3.24 ^a	3.11 ^{ab}	3.07 ^b	3.13^y	2.89 ^a	3.07 ^{ab}	3.12 ^{ab}	3.19 ^b	3.13^x	2.98 ^a	2.70 ^b	2.71 ^b	2.74 ^b	2.73^z
Respond to personnel matters	2.90	2.94	3.01	2.93	2.95*	2.74	2.79	2.76	2.78	2.78^z	2.95	2.84	2.71	2.79	2.77^z
Designing and delivering HR products and services	3.18	3.24	3.17	3.16	3.18^y	3.05	3.01	3.13	3.11	3.10^x	3.02	2.83	2.86	3.01	2.93^y
Staff care	2.99	3.02	3.08	3.00	3.03*	2.89	2.99	2.92	2.94	2.94^y	3.24	3.21	3.06	3.10	3.11^x
Resource management	3.00	3.02	3.04	3.03	3.03*	3.04	3.00	2.93	2.94	2.95^y	2.92	3.07	3.11	3.14	3.11^x

Notes:

¹ Main effect characterisation: $F(5,5710) = 16,16, p = .00$; interaction effect characterisation x cohort: $F(15,5710) = 1.88, p = .02$

² Main effect characterisation: $F(5,5665) = 17,29, p = .00$; interaction effect characterisation x cohort: $F(15,5710) = 3.04, p = .00$

³ Main effect characterisation: $F(5,5910) = 50,04, p = .00$; interaction effect characterisation x cohort: $F(15,5910) = 3.22, p = .00$

Reported means with different superscripts (x, y and z) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the column totals

Reported means with different superscripts (a and b) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the row columns

Table 4: Characterisation of the department according to HR professionals, HR managers and line managers per cohort and the total

Time dedication of the HR Professionals

In line with the findings of Woering and Van Dartel (2014), the HR function is still very broad; HR professionals are active in many areas. They spend most of the time 'staffing' and 'maintaining working conditions' and the least time on 'organisational development' and 'staff management' (see table 5). Where in the previous findings of Woering & Van Dartel (2014) we talk about a balanced mix of policy and executive activities, we are less aware of this in the current research. HR professionals have been spending less time on organisational development over the past few years, but more time on staff management. The interviews showed that fewer HR professionals spend time supporting reorganisation (from 60% to 34%) and cultural change (52% to

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31%). In terms of human resource management, we see an increase among HR professionals in the time spent managing personal information systems (from 31% to 45%) and the implementation of administrative matters relating to staffing processes (from 22% to 40%). Two HR professionals say the following:

'In previous years, I was very busy drawing up and implementing HRM policy. Now I'm working more on managing this policy'

'The function has changed to a more executive and administrative function. In addition, the manner of contacts with business has changed. The organisation is increasingly asking for figures. I need to analyse more numbers and get more out of systems, including failure and formation figures'.

HR managers spend a lot of time on staffing (especially staff planning), but are in contrast to HR professionals also largely involved in organisational development: in particular, organising the organisational strategy, reorganisation and cultural change programs. It is noteworthy that here too, the trend is that HR managers spend the least amount of time on personnel management compared with other activities, but they are doing more and more in recent years. The interviews showed that there was a slight increase in the compilation and reporting of staff information (from 15% to 17%) and to employee satisfaction surveys (from 8% to 13%). Despite this slight increase in staffing time, we clearly see that HR professionals in relation to HR executives have had more operational HR tasks and less strategic tasks in recent years. In line with the findings that HR professionals and HR managers are typifying their department more differently, it seems that the daily work of the professional and its manager seems to be increasingly different. Two HR professionals:

'Previously, there were fewer hierarchical levels and my job was broader, the contact was often directly with the line managers. Now another HR manager is found in between. This means that more permission needs to be obtained on different levels. Sometimes, even the HR director will be involved'.

'In recent years, the HR department has been different, more centralised, and so my function has shifted from a generalist perspective to a specialist perspective'.

The interviews show that HR tasks in some organisations have become more specialised due to a stronger centralisation of the HR department. As a consequence, the broader package of tasks will be partially eliminated. This may mean that the strategic tasks are less likely to be the responsibility of HR professionals.

Line managers spend their time mainly on staffing (especially selection talks), but also organisational development (especially team development) and staff development (specifically career discussions). In recent years, the time spent by line managers on absenteeism and vitality has diminished.

	HR-professional ¹					HR-leidinggevende ²					Lijnmanager ³				
	year 1 (n=103)	year 2 (n=240)	year 3 (n=376)	year 4 (n=423)	total (n=1147)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=153)	year 3 (n=390)	year 4 (n=537)	total (n=1137)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=153)	year 3 (n=390)	year 4 (n=537)	total (n=1186)
Staffing	3.11	3.14	3.07	3.11	3.10[*]	2.84 ^a	2.92 ^a	3.13 ^b	3.14 ^b	3.09^y	3.08	2.95	2.93	2.99	2.97^x
Employee Development	2.85	2.85	2.73	2.70	2.76^y	2.72 ^a	2.89 ^{ab}	2.97 ^{ab}	3.02 ^b	2.97^y	2.84	2.92	2.83	2.88	2.87^x
Organisational development	2.71	2.67	2.58	2.44	2.56^z	3.16	3.31	3.27	3.25	3.26^x	2.98	2.85	2.94	2.90	2.91^x
Working conditions	2.93	2.92	2.86	2.86	2.88^y	2.61	2.60	2.77	2.74	2.72^z	1.87	1.91	1.90	1.91	1.90^z

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Absenteeism and vitality	2.90	2.87	2.76	2.74	2.79^y	2.28 ^a	2.28 ^a	2.52 ^b	2.47 ^b	2.45^z	2.60 ^a	2.41 ^{ab}	2.30 ^b	2.20 ^b	2.29^y
Working relations	2.73	2.70	2.60	2.52	2.60^z	3.04	2.91	3.04	2.98	2.99^y	2.69	2.63	2.46	2.46	2.49^y
Staff management	2.14	2.27	2.44	2.58	2.43^z	2.04	1.71	2.04	2.13	2.03^z	1.90	1.70	1.85	1.70	1.76^z

Notes:

¹ Main effect time management: $F(6,6858) = 8.79, p = .00$; interaction effect time management x cohort: $F(15,6858) = 3.50, p = .00$

² Main effect time management: $F(6,6882) = 178.59, p = .00$; interaction effect time management x cohort: $F(18,6882) = 2.19, p = .00$

³ Main effect time management: $F(6,7188) = 242.39, p = .00$; interaction effect time management x cohort: $F(18,7188) = 2.16, p = .00$

Reported means with different superscripts (x, y and z) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the column totals

Reported means with different superscripts (a and b) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the row column

Table 5: Time management of HR activities according to HR professionals, HR managers and line managers per cohort and total

Competencies of the HR Professionals

Personal integrity is seen by HR professionals as the most commonly used in HR's daily work (see Table 6). A HR professional comments: 'by living integrity, you give the employees the feeling that they can count on the HR department if there are problems. By promoting this confidence amongst employees, they will come to HR faster, which can often allow or problems to be solved in time'.

Furthermore, 'personal integrity is important because what you say should not be a point for discussion later'. In addition, HR professionals are currently more often called upon for their professional expertise: 'where we used to work in a specific area, we are currently working in general service. This means it requires more professional expertise because you can be deployed in multiple areas.' As noted by Woering and van Dartel (2014), the least appealing skill is 'business knowledge'. This is remarkable, given the many publications about the increasing importance of the role of 'HR as business partner' (Caldwell, 2008; Ulrich, 1997).

In 2014, the competency the 'management of change' was seen as a competency that would become increasingly important in the future (Woering & van Dartel, 2014). However, from our comparison over the years, this does not appear to be the case. The extent to which HR professionals make use of this competency remains almost the same throughout the years. Furthermore, it is found that HR professionals are increasingly reliant on the competency 'ability to influence'. This is also striking because it is an important competency to fulfill the business partner role.

The results of HR management's measurements are in line with those of HR professionals: 'Personal integrity', 'Management of change' and 'Ability to influence' are the most important competencies that are called upon, Business knowledge is the least called for. In the latter field of competence, there is a difference between HR managers and HR professionals: HR managers are more likely to seek business knowledge than HR professionals (see also Woering & van Dartel, 2014).

	HR-professional ¹					HR-leidinggevende ²				
	year 1 (n=103)	year 2 (n=245)	year 3 (n=377)	year 4 (n=423)	total (n=1148)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=159)	year 3 (n=391)	year 4 (n=540)	total (n=1147)
Personal integrity	3.76	3.72	3.68	3.72	3.71^x	3.67	3.72	3.61	3.68	3.66^x
Management of change	3.44	3.47	3.37	3.40	3.41^y	3.47	3.55	3.51	3.58	3.55^x
Business knowledge	2.97	3.02	3.03	3.04	3.03^z	3.30	3.33	3.28	3.31	3.30^y
Leading Power	3.50 ^a	3.47 ^a	3.41 ^{ab}	3.34 ^b	3.41^y	3.39	3.52	3.50	3.57	3.53^x
HR expertise	3.56	3.67	3.53	3.56	3.57^y	3.23	3.30	3.32	3.35	3.33^y

Notes:

¹ Main effect competencies: $F(4,4572) = 32.68, p = .00$; interaction effect competencies x cohort: $F(12,4572) = 1.45, p = .13$

² Main effect competencies: $F(4,4572) = 43.20, p = .00$; interaction effect competencies x cohort: $F(12,4572) = .56, p = .88$

Reported means with different superscripts (x, y and z) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the column totals

Reported means with different superscripts (a and b) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the row columns

Table 6: Required competencies according to HR professionals, HR managers per cohort and total

Distribution of HR tasks between HR and Line Management

Over the years, a shift in who is responsible for HR activities has occurred. The responsibility for 'personnel management' and 'working conditions' is largely the responsibility of the HR professionals. According to the HR professionals responsibility for 'absenteeism and vitality', 'labour relations' and 'staffing', leads more towards a shared responsibility (see Table 7). Organisation development is seen by HR professionals as a full collective responsibility. At last, HR professionals see that personnel development has become OR see that personnel development as an increasingly important responsibility for line management. HR managers generally agree with HR professionals, however they find that the responsibility for organisational development is more a HR related task. Considering the view that the HR department is increasingly characterised as directed towards HR strategy and supporting change processes, as opposed to the view of HR professionals as described above, this finding seems logical.

The results of the line managers are largely in line with those of HR professionals and HR managers: personnel management and working conditions are in their view, primarily a responsibility for HR professionals, whilst staff development is more the responsibility of line management. However, unlike HR managers, they see themselves more responsible for organisational development. In this regard, HR professionals, HR managers and line managers differ in opinion. One possible explanation for this is that the respondent groups are involved in various aspects of organisational development (see also 3.2): line managers focus more on team development, while HR managers are less involved in this and provide more support in reorganisation and cultural change.

The findings of Woering & Van Dartel (2014) that HR is present within line management is a fact and is further substantiated in this research. In particular, HR professionals see a significant trend that HR activities: 'staff development,' 'labour relations,' 'employment conditions' and 'organisational development' have shifted over the years to being the joint responsibility of HR and line management. In the interviews with HR professionals, this also emerges:

'When I came in here, the HR department was still very traditionally appointed as a Personnel Management department. First of all, many tasks of this Personnel Management PM department were shifted to the line management. You can think of performance discussions, as well as conversations between employee (s) and HR about certain issues in the department. Of course, here's the direct responsibility for line management and the direct supervisor of this employee (s).'

'HR is increasingly considering whether there is or is not a job for HR. Many responsibilities are on the line management level'.

'These results show, that there is an increased tendency to place HR tasks in the line, on the other hand, the operational side of HR is increasingly being invested in by HR professionals. At the same time, it also emphasises that the operational tasks are increasingly being entrusted to HR professionals and the strategic tasks to the HR managers'.

	HR-professional ¹	HR-leidinggevende ²	Lijnmanager ³
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MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT THE DAILY REALITY OF HRM

	year 1 (n=53)	year 2 (n=138)	year3 (n=239)	year 4 (n=257)	total (n=687)	year (n=57)	year 2 (n=159)	year 3 (n=393)	year 4 (n=542)	total (n=1151)	year 1 (n=62)	year 2 (n=168)	year 3 (n=354)	year 4 (n=468)	Total (n = 1052)
Staffing	2.85	2.86	2.94	2.90	2.90^a	2.86	2.96	2.94	2.91	2.93^a	3.08	3.14	2.92	2.94	2.97
Employee Development	2.96 ^a	2.99 ^a	3.16 ^b	3.15 ^b	3.11^a	2.93	3.11	3.05	3.01	3.03	2.84 ^a	3.36 ^b	3.12 ^{ab}	3.25 ^b	3.20^a
Organisational development	2.79 ^a	2.80 ^a	3.05 ^b	3.17 ^b	3.03	2.82	2.83	2.78	2.76	2.78^a	2.98	3.09	3.15	3.15	3.13^a
Working conditions	2.08 ^a	2.10 ^a	2.32 ^b	2.34 ^b	2.26^{ab}	2.02	2.09	2.08	2.01	2.05^{ab}	1.87	2.04	2.04	2.10	2.06^{ab}
Absenteeism and vitality	2.62	2.57	2.71	2.79	2.71^{ab}	2.63	2.52	2.68	2.64	2.63^{ab}	2.60	2.59	2.47	2.46	2.49^{ab}
Working relations	2.72 ^{ab}	2.66 ^b	2.91 ^b	2.88 ^b	2.83^a	2.77	2.71	2.59	2.59	2.62^{ab}	2.69	3.15	2.70	2.83	2.83^a
Staff management	1.96	1.77	2.01	1.87	1.90^{ab}	2.23	1.89	1.79	1.79	1.82^{ab}	1.90	1.88	1.80	1.76	1.80^{ab}

Noot:

¹ Main effect task distribution: $F(6,4092) = 23.14, p = .00$; interaction effect task distribution x cohort: $F(18,4092) = 1.08, p = .36$

² Main effect task distribution: $F(6,6348) = 175.13, p = .00$; interaction effect task distribution x cohort: $F(18,6348) = 1.70, p = .03$

³ Main effect task distribution: $F(6,6288) = 257.62, p = .00$; interaction effect task distribution x cohort: $F(18,6288) = 3.18, p = .00$

* rapported means differ significantly ($p < .05$) from the mid point of the scale (=3)

** rapported means differ significantly ($p < .01$) from the mid point of the scale (=3)

Reported means with different superscripts (a and b) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the row columns

Table 7: Distribution HR tasks according to HR professionals, HR managers and line managers per cohort and total

Passing factors for executing HR tasks through Line Management

In line with the findings of Woering & van Dartel (2014), line managers are sufficiently motivated to perform HR tasks, this is according to both themselves, but also HR professionals and HR managers (see Table 8). Experienced line managers also find that there is sufficient support from HR and that there are sufficient clear procedures and guidelines to perform these tasks. HR professionals and HR managers share this opinion. Time appears to be the biggest bottleneck, as was also evident from the findings of Woering & Van Dartel (2014). Both line managers and HR professionals as well as HR executives, experience that line management has little time to address HR tasks. Line managers indicate in the interviews that there are so many tasks already needing to be achieved that they cannot invest anymore time in HR tasks. HR professionals recognise that: line managers do not always have enough time to do HR tasks, commonly due to time pressure. Additionally, the specific competencies of line managers that are needed to adequately perform HR tasks are a point of contention amongst HR professionals and HR managers; while line managers indicate they do in fact possess these competencies. In addition, we see a trend that HR professionals believe that line managers increasingly possess these competencies (see table 8). A HR professional commented: ‘More and more HR tasks are being carried out by the line management and I notice that they are getting better and better. Sometimes job interviews are conducted without a HR adviser even attending the conversation’.

	HR-professional ¹					HR manager ²					Line manager ³				
	year 1 (n=103)	year 2 (n=245)	year 3 (n=377)	year 4 (n=423)	total (n=1148)	year 1 (n=57)	year 2 (n=156)	year 3 (n=391)	year 4 (n=542)	total (n=1146)	year 1 (n=62)	year 2 (n=176)	year 3 (n=409)	year 4 (n=552)	total (n = 1199)
Motivation	2.69	2.72	2.72	2.73	2.73^a	2.68	2.63	2.58	2.62	2.61^a	3.15	3.24	3.11	3.04	3.10^a
Time	2.08	2.17	2.25	2.14	2.18^a	2.33	2.38	2.21	2.22	2.25^a	2.31	2.24	2.35	2.23	2.28^a
HR related competencies	2.29 ^a	2.32 ^{ab}	2.40 ^{ab}	2.47 ^b	2.40^a	2.33	2.24	2.19	2.20	2.21^a	2.56	2.77	2.77	2.66	2.71^a
Support from HR	3.06	3.01	3.01	3.10	3.05^a	3.11	3.10	3.02	2.98	3.02^a	3.32 ^a	3.18 ^a	2.92 ^b	3.01 ^b	3.02^a
Procedures and regulations	2.84	2.67	2.78	2.75	2.75^a	2.82	2.92	2.85	2.73	2.80^a	2.81 ^a	2.78 ^a	2.58 ^b	2.49 ^b	2.59^a

Noot:

¹ Main effect success factor: $F(4,4572) = 56.78, p = .00$; interaction effect success factor x cohort: $F(12,4572) = 2.39, p = .01$

² Main effect success factor: $F(4,4568) = 186.15, p = .00$; interaction effect success factor x cohort: $F(12,4568) = 1.28, p = .22$

³ Main effect success factor: $F(4,4780) = 198.62, p = .00$; interaction effect success factor x cohort: $F(12,4780) = 5.10, p = .00$

* rapported means differ significantly ($p < .05$) from the mid point of the scale (=2.5)

Reported means with different superscripts (a and b) differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$) in the row columns

Table 8: Success factors for HR execution by HR professionals, HR managers and line managers per cohort and total

DISCUSSION

Through a large-scale survey which included over four thousand HR professionals, HR executives and line managers over the past four years the daily reality of HRM has been mapped. This study is of added value for multiple reasons that will be explained in the following section.

First, the value of the HR field has for many years been regularly challenged by critical observers of the field (Capelli, 2015; Hammond, 2005), often without substantial underlying research. In this study, we provide insight into the actual developments in the field on the grounds of a large-scale survey of not only HR professionals themselves, but also their supervisors and line managers. Secondly, this study not only focused on the current daily reality, but also described the development of HR over the last four years. The development in the practice of the HR professional is relevant because in recent years it is increasingly suggested that the HR function has changed drastically due to automation, globalisation and ever faster changing careers and organisations (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). In this study, we present how this development is actually already visible in the daily routine of the HR professional. Finally, this study contributes to the large scale global study of Ulrich dedicated to the competencies of an effective HR professional (Ulrich, 2016; Ulrich, 2012; Ulrich, 2013). Therefore, we not only focus on the competencies of the HR professional, but also on the daily work and concrete activities. Moreover, our research gives a more precise picture of the daily routine of the HR professional. Whereas Ulrich describes the international situation, we zoom in on the practice in the Netherlands.

'Development': the most important theme for HR

Current research shows that organisational development has been the main theme for HR in the last four years. Not only HR professionals themselves, but also their managers and line managers are of this opinion. This is partly in line with the image that organisations are increasingly aware of, namely, that it is important to move along with the fast and continuous changes in the environment they operate in. However, organisational development is also about reorganisation. Many organisations have undergone a shrinkage in recent years, and this research shows that HR professionals have been working hard to support reorganisation during those shrinking years. However, it has only been in the last two years that we are seeing the focus on organisational development. So the question is to what extent this theme will continue to evolve in the coming years. In addition to organisational development, talent management and leadership development are often referred to as important HR themes. The importance that HR professionals attach to talent and leadership also fits into the new workplace reality, in which employees will have to be challenged and pushed to function in rapidly changing environments, organisations and careers (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2012; Van Est & Kool, 2015; Ulrich, 2015).

Different viewpoints about the position of the HR department

In recent years, HR professionals, as well as their executives, have most strongly regarded the HR department as a designer and supplier of HR products and services. Line managers have a more classical view on the HR department and believe that the HR department is mainly focused on

personnel and personnel management. It is striking that in recent years HR professionals, in contrast to HR managers, have been recruiting the HR department with less focus on the vision and HR strategy. This is remarkable because literature emphasises the importance of strategic positioning of HR professionals, with strategic HRM becoming a key aspect (Boselie, 2010). In the research of Woering & Van Dartel (2014) the balanced mix between executive and policy tasks is discussed, and interestingly we see in this survey that HR professionals spend less and less time on the strategic side of HR. These strategic tasks seem to be increasingly addressed by HR executives. In short, the tasks of HR professionals and HR managers are further developed. A possible explanation lies in the increasing centralisation of many HR departments and the associated sharp distinction between tasks: many HR professionals indicated in the interviews that they previously had a broad task package, but now have become more specialised.

HR professionals dedicate more time towards Staff Management

In addition to the fact that HR professionals spend less time on the strategic side of HR, we also see an increase in the time spent on personnel management. This shift is striking: usually, the assumption is that smart e-HRM systems have taken on many human resource management tasks (Bondarouk, Harms & Lepak, 2015). Possibly, the organisation and management of these systems requires more time than estimated for HR professionals. In addition, the interviews show that more and more organisations are asking for numerical support for HR policy. HR professionals indicate that they are very busy in unlocking and analysing information from these systems

Personal Integrity most important, Business Knowledge least important

The main competence that HR professionals call upon was and remains personal integrity (see also Woering & Van Dartel, 2014). HR managers have the same view of the necessary HR competencies, although they are more often called upon for their business knowledge than HR professionals. The great importance of personal integrity is in line with Ulrich's findings (2007; 2012; 2016), which describes this competence, under the name of 'credible activist' which for many years was the basic competence of an effective HR professional. On the other hand, there is relatively little appeal to the competence 'business knowledge'. This is remarkable, given the many publications about the increasing importance of the role of 'HR as a business partner' in which broader knowledge about business processes is important (Caldwell, 2008; Ulrich, 1997). At the same time, this finding fits with the view that HR professionals spend less time with the strategy and that the role of the HR business partner is increasingly being filled in by the HR supervisor.

Collective responsibility of HR and Line Management

The finding of Woering & Van Dartel (2014) that HR within line management is a fact, has been further underlined in this research. There is a trend which outlines that the HR tasks focused on staff development, labour relations, working conditions and organisational development have shifted through the years towards being a shared responsibility between the HR department and the line management. When it comes to success factors that determine if a line manager can perform HR tasks adequately, this research shows that line managers are sufficiently motivated to do so. Furthermore, line managers experience that there is sufficient support from HR and that there are sufficient clear procedures and guidelines to perform these tasks. However, time seems to be the

biggest bottleneck, as was indicated by Woering & Van Dartel's findings (2014). Both line managers and HR professionals, as well as HR executives, experience that line management has little time to address HR tasks. In addition, the skills of line managers to adequately implement these HR tasks are an issue of attention in many organisations. These findings are consistent with the study by Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk and Looise (2013): they conclude that for most line managers, the motivation for performing such tasks is often high. To round off, HR can in particular contribute by investing in the line managers' abilities and ensuring that they have sufficient opportunities to perform HR activities well.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

Preparing for the complex reality of HR: dealing with different interests

The results of the research grounded us: the HR professional is yet to become the strategic partner, even though that is often how they are described in professional literature. HR is still occupied with performing operational tasks, and they are expected to do so by the line management. HR professionals should therefore invest heavily in the best execution of these operational HR activities. This goes beyond 'the basis must be in order' as is often stated in the journals. According to the HR professionals themselves the starting point is a strong knowledge and use of the competence 'personal integrity'. According to Ulrich's latest insights (2016), that competence is closely linked to smart navigation between all kinds of paradoxes that the HR professionals face for example: employee interests versus corporate interests; short-term versus long-term interests. Furthermore, this is linked to the 'paradox navigator' who possesses all kinds of practical, political and communicative skills. HR managers can play an important role in this, and the training should be well-prepared for (future) HR professionals. This can be done, for example, by having practice dilemmas that appeal to navigating between different paradigms and tension fields. Students can be trained in skills such as dealing with opposing interests and constantly changing demands.

Strategic business partner or 'critical friend'

Often, strategic HRM is seen as the future of HRM (Boselie, 2010; Ulrich 2012). This research shows that this is applicable to the HR professional: they must first and foremost be an expert in the good delivery of HR products and services. The idea that HR 'has to contribute to the strategic agenda of the organisation' (Ulrich, 2012) does not clearly reflect on the daily routine of HR professionals, because the strategic side of the HR profession is becoming increasingly more associated with HR executives. This does not mean that HR professionals must withdraw from the strategic level. HR professionals could make a significant contribution to organisations in the preparation of strategic decisions through evidence-based insights based on, for example, HR analytics. They should also be able to understand the tension fields associated with intended decisions, thereby translating the effects of decisions into a number of scenarios. In this way, HR professionals will be able to critically discuss decisions and actually be a critical friend for HR managers and (line) management. For HRM training this means that knowledge and application of evidence-based HRM methods such as HR analytics are crucial. In addition, it is possible to identify and understand developments and tension fields inside and outside the organisation. This concerns the previously described competence of 'paradox navigator' (Ulrich, 2016).

The role of the HR Professional with attention for HR development

The increasing focus on talent, leadership and organisational development as important HR themes may not be surprising, but the research does not give a clear picture of how HR professionals position themselves in these areas of concern. The ongoing shift of responsibility for the development of employees and teams to line management, demands another role of HR. Here too, the role of the 'paradox navigator' and 'critical friend' of (line) management is appropriate. For example, if it involves talent development within organisations, management primarily regards it from an organisational interest standpoint. (Thunnissen, 2015). Under the name of talent management, instruments like competence management and performance management are used, which actually imply what talent is expected from the employees. HR professionals have an important role by discussing a unilateral approach to talent management and also monitoring the importance of the employee in need of meaningful and autonomous work. This also applies to leadership development. Here too, HR can ensure that management development processes do not focus unilaterally on learning leadership skills that are desirable primarily from the organisation.

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