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Perceptions of Profession and of being a Professional among Personnel/HRM Practitioners: A Phenomenographic Inquiry

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Doctorate in Education

Perceptions of Profession and of being a Professional among Personnel/HRM Practitioners: A Phenomenographic Inquiry.

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Submitted: August 2009

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis explores the phenomena of profession and of being a professional among Personnel/Human Resource Management (P/HRM) Practitioners in the United Kingdom. The use of the term Personnel/Human Resource Management reflects a lack of consensus over nomenclature.

Twenty semi structured interviews were undertaken between December 2006 and January 2007 using a purposely selected research sample stratified against qualification, experience, gender and organizational type to ensure representation across the public and private sectors.

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of professions in general, their perceptions of their own roles as practitioners, about the influence of their respective work organizations on their professional status and about their perceptions of the Professional Institution the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Phenomenography was the selected qualitative research approach as it provided a framework for describing experience and examining variations in experience. The essence of the approach is that it takes a relational qualitative perspective that aims to describe key aspects of variation in the collective experience of phenomena, rather than focusing on the individual experience. The accepted approach in phenomenographic data analysis is to start with an analysis of the interview transcripts. However, a particular feature of this study was the analysis of the actual audio recordings of the interviews; this provided an additional level of insight and data but marked a significant departure from previously 'accepted' approaches.

The study revealed a changing construction of profession and a reorientation of what it means to be a professional. Professionalism was constructed as the concern of the individual rather than the collective, and is best described as the 'professional project of the self' and was characterized by a reliance on individual integrity, ethics and credibility. Professionalism was influenced by the 'know how' of the practitioners, their status within the occupation and work organization and was related to their ability to acquire and demonstrate business acumen,

political awareness and the skills of self promotion and critical reflection. Respondents perceived the role and influence of the Professional Institute, The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) as limited, while the work organization was perceived to have an impact on the status of the individual practitioner and the function.

In the context of this study it was the ability of the practitioner to know about and contribute to the wider business agenda that enhanced their individual and collective professional credibility and status.

The implications for educational policy and practice are identified as being concerned with the way in which future practitioners and new career entrants are educated, trained and supported to develop an appropriate business awareness and the new skills set required to be successful, to understand the significance of an increasing reliance on 'self' as the mediator of professionalism and to manage effectively a relationship between the practitioner and the work organization which is perceived as evolving as Personnel/Human Resource Management (P/HRM) aspires to the status of a recognised profession.

Thesis Declaration

I, Julia Pointon (X3790913) declare that the Doctorate in Education (EdD) thesis entitled 'Perceptions of Profession and of being a Professional among Personnel/HRM Practitioners: A Phenomenographic Inquiry' contains no material that has been incorporated in a previous submission for a higher degree or other academic award of this or any other awarding body. Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

Julia C Pointon

August 2009

Thesis Acknowledgement

The completion of this research degree would not have been possible without the support and guidance offered to me by my supervisor Dr.H.M.M.Burgess.

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CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
CPD	Continuing Professional development
HRM	Human Resource Management
PDS	Professional Development Scheme
PM	Personnel Management
P/HRM	Personnel/Human Resource Management

Chapter One   Introduction and Overview

1.1   Introduction

This Doctoral thesis explores the phenomena of profession and of being a professional among Personnel/Human Resource Management (P/HRM) Practitioners in the United Kingdom. The use of the term Personnel/Human Resource Management reflects a lack of consensus over nomenclature.

The study was stimulated by my career history as a P/HRM Practitioner and as an academic in HRM with responsibility for a Masters programme leading to accreditation by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Motivation also came through my involvement in national educational policy development with the CIPD and through my practical involvement as a branch chair of the CIPD. In addition, five years ago I established a 'Research into Practice' forum comprising of local employers. Through my engagement with this group I became aware of their concerns that new career entrants did not seem to possess the business knowledge or the operational skills they required in order to be able to make a substantive contribution.

However, an even more powerful stimulus for my research work lay in an unexpected observation I made during 2005. 'Something' in my professional arena was changing. I was motivated to understand what it was, why it was changing and how it might affect my role and my work as an academic, my role with the CIPD and as an educationalist and trainer of practitioners. I was also interested to understand the impact this change may have on the perceptions of the practitioners themselves, on their careers, the roles they occupied in their respective organizations and on their professional standing.

1.2   A Context of Change

It was in the academic year of 2005 when I became aware that 'something' was changing. The module and programme evaluation questionnaires from students on CIPD accredited programmes highlighted concerns about the curriculum content. Their comments suggested the business skills and knowledge they needed to be able to undertake their roles effectively

were not being delivered through the programme. The CIPD curriculum emphasises the acquisition of technical knowledge gained from specialist modules including employment law, employee resourcing, learning and development, with limited focus on gaining knowledge or understanding of the overarching business context. The students' comments pointed to how a deficit in their understanding of business related issues, in particular financial analysis and planning, limited their ability to contribute to wider business decisions. They also reported feelings of professional inferiority when they compared themselves with other organizational roles such as accounting or marketing executives. I noted similar comments from the business leaders attending the Employers Forum. They spoke of the need for the role and function of P/HRM to change, to become more proactive, to assume the mantle of 'business partner' and demonstrate effective political and influencing skills, rather than the more general interpersonal skills associated with traditional personnel managers.

The voices of the students and the employers were not alone. Their sentiments were also echoed in the professional P/HRM research literature which was questioning the extent to which traditional conceptions of people management remained relevant to a working environment in which the old monopolistic concentrations on profit were giving way to a new focus on quality and accountability (Graham 2001:15). The P/HRM literature described an evolution in the current state of the function which was characterised by a change in the relationship between HRM and line managers, a new focus on measuring contribution and a concern to respond to the individual needs of the business. This call for a shift in the nature of Personnel/HR management was later to be exemplified in the work of the Institute for Employment Studies (Reilly et al. 2007) which emphasised the need for practitioners to recognise and respond to 'The Changing HR Function'. The P/HRM literature served to confirm my observations of change and reinforced my motivation to explore the phenomenon in greater depth. Alongside a changing business and P/HRM environment were muted changes within the CIPD itself. A repositioning of the CIPD qualification at Masters Level, a review of the professional accreditation standards, a revision of membership routes and a simultaneous change in leadership and staffing at the Institute, all combined to confirm a picture in which the changing nature of the occupational field emerged as a central theme.

1.3   From Personnel to Human Resource Management

Articles in the occupational and academic journals were calling for a leveraging in the contribution P/HRM made to the business (Gilmore and Williams 2007). The articles stimulated rhetorical questions concerning the role and nature of the function, about whether the function was primarily concerned with administration and operational compliance as enshrined in the idea of personnel management; or whether it was a strategic business oriented function referred to as Human Resource Management (Gold and Bratton 2003), or whether the function was a hybrid, referred to by Legge as 'old wine in new bottles' (1995:36).

Previous studies of the professions have sought to understand the phenomenon as a social construct. Parsons (1939), for example researched 'The Professions and Social Structure', Torstendhal and Burrage (1990) investigated how professions were formed and later Collins (1990) and Brante (1998) reconsidered the professions as a powerful sociological construct. The work of Derber (1990) focused on professions as an aspect of national culture, that of DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) focussed on the necessary achievement of professional recognition as a feature of career development, Westwood (2000) later explored it as 'prerequisite for progression'; while the work of Ukpo (2005) on professionalism among Nigerian teachers focussed on all three aspects!

There have been previous studies that have taken specific occupations as their primary focus for example Sudin's study of nurses (2001), Elsaka's (2004) studies of Australian journalists and Boon's (2007) study of Information Literacy Tutors are all excellent examples of generic occupational studies; but they did not set out to elicit the perceptions of the actual practitioners or to make reference to the possible influence of the employing organization. Equally there have been effective studies focussing on the whole concept of professional identity irrespective of the occupation, for example Edman's work on theorising the professions (2001), Eaton-Walley and Lowe's (2004) study on work autonomy and professional independence or Dobrow and Higgins (2005) study on networks and professional identity, but these studies tended to focus on the general level of the collective – they did not, unlike this research work, seek understanding at the level of the individual practitioner.

Finally, the evolution of the established professions has been well documented in the sociology of the professions, with influential works on medicine (Hall 1987; Fitzgerald 1994; 2000; 2002; Leicht 1997; Hafferty 2003 and Dent 2005) law (Dingwell 1976; 1983) and accounting (Kalber 1995; Grey 1998) contributing to a considerable amount of theoretical data. The 'new' professions such as nursing (Hallam 2002) teaching (Walker 2001; Bradbeer 2004; Trigwell et al. 2005) and social work (Cannan 1995; Forte 2004; Hughes 2006) are gradually weaving their way into the literature, but considerations of P/HRM as a profession remains largely unreported and underdeveloped.

This study therefore makes a new contribution to knowledge by researching a specific occupational group, sampled against qualification, current employment experience and organizational type. It is concerned with individual perceptions – rather than occupational generalisation and therefore seeks to contribute to an area of understanding which has to date witnessed limited research.

1.4 A Phenomenographic Study

A frequently adopted methodology in the works detailed above was case study. Case study methods involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: a case. As Flyberg (2006) and Dul and Halk (2008) comment, they represent a research approach situated between concrete data taking techniques and other methodologic paradigms. Setting aside a further replication of a case study I selected a relatively new methodology in the field of educational studies called phenomenography. As the researcher I planned to analyse how respondents perceived and made sense of the phenomenon of profession and of being a profession, I therefore required a flexible data collection method. Few previous studies in P/HRM (Chapman and Smith 2002) have employed an interpretative perspective that potentially offers a rich, in-depth approach to this important area of research. Given this gap, my work presents the value of taking a practitioner based interpretive approach to understanding the way in which profession and being professional in the context of P/HRM is viewed. In this work I report the findings of a phenomenographic study of twenty in-depth interviews

1.5   A contribution to Methodology

Finally, in the process of introducing this study I draw attention to the contribution this work makes to research practice and in particular to the process of analysing phenomenographic data. It is fair to say that the analysis stage of phenomenographic research is often not well understood and that proper evaluation of the phenomenographic approach has, in the past, been bedevilled by a lack of specificity and explicitness concerning both the methods for the collection and analysis of data and the conceptual underpinning of those methods (Francis 1996). Indeed, there are undoubtedly some studies, for example Ekeblad and Lindström's (1995) work on the design of instructional computer applications, which attempt to circumvent the whole issue and make no attempt at all to detail the process of analysis. While others, such as Richardson's (1999) work on 'Concepts and Methods', provides a clear account of the stages and process of data analysis, thereby adding to the overall validity and reliability of the findings.

In most studies data analysis was based only on the written text derived from verbatim transcripts (Marton 1981; 1988; 1994; Säljö; 1996; Svensson 1983; 1997; 2006). Being determined to follow protocol as precisely as possible, my initial attempt at data analysis followed this format, however I soon realised I was missing vital data, because the text based transcriptions did not always convey the voice or the perception behind the words. I made an informed, but nonetheless independent decision, to vary my approach to analysis and to listen to the audio transcriptions before I read the text based data. Through this variation, which I have detailed in full, I believe I have made a significant contribution to ensuring the methodological rigour of the approach and addressing the possible limitations referred to below.

1.6   The Structure of Thesis

Chapter two provides details of the context within which P/HRM practitioners operate. It charts the history and development of the Professional Institute: 'The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development' (CIPD). It explains membership grades, the structure, mission

and strategy. In so doing the chapter evidences the rather piecemeal and ad hoc nature of the Institute's evolution and the evolution and function of P/HRM.

Chapter three reviews the sociological literature on the professions with particular focus on traits and power theories, and on understanding the development of the professions as a professional project.

Chapter four focuses on the development of a theoretical and conceptual framework for examining individual perceptions of the phenomenon of profession and of being professional and explains why the study employed qualitative, inductive and naturalistic research tools located in a phenomenographic approach.

Chapter five describes the process of collecting phenomenographic data and provides information concerning how the data were collected.

Chapter six details the process of data analysis and it draws attention to the methodological decision I made to adapt the normal approach to analysis and start by listening to the audio recordings of the research interviews.

Chapter seven provides an analysis of the data and draws attention to the main conclusion which rests on an evolving perception of profession and of being a professional.

Chapter eight concludes the thesis with a review of its principal findings, an overview of the contribution to theory and practice made by the study and recommendations for future research.

1.7   Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined my motivation for the study. It highlighted how the interconnected themes of my work as an academic, researcher and practitioner provided the stimulation and impetus of the work. The introduction has also drawn attention to the context of the study,

characterised by one in which the differences between personnel and HRM were being openly debated and challenged in the academic and occupational journals. A context in which the role and contribution of P/HRM to business success was being re-evaluated and a context in which students were reporting feelings of disempowerment within the workplace and were questioning the validity of what they were being taught. In short the introduction has provided an overview characterised by shifting professional territories, evolving business expectations and a reorienting of the professional institute. Finally, the introduction explained how this work would move away from the more traditional case study approach and adopt a relatively new inductive method of inquiry to explore qualitatively different ways in which practitioners understand the related concepts of a profession and of being a professional.

Chapter Two The Professional Institute and the Research Context

2.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a brief history of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development which is the recognised Professional Institute for practitioners of P/HRM. It outlines membership structure and strategic objectives of the Professional Institute because in the literature (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Parsons 1939) indicate the establishment of a Professional Institution is regarded as the cornerstone in the evolution of any profession.

The chapter then focuses on the context in which P/HRM operates. It draws attention to the theoretical and operational differences between them and in so doing the chapter highlights the essentially administrative nature of personnel and contrasts this with the strategic orientation of HRM.

2.2 The History of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) based in London has a membership of 139,000 (December 2008), representing the highest level of membership achieved to date. The Institute, one of the largest in Europe for individuals specialising in the management and development of people, has the stated objective of 'promoting the art and science of the management and development of people for the public benefit'.

The mission of the CIPD is:

- to lead in the development and promotion of good practice in the field of the management and development of people, for application both by professional members and by their organizational colleagues

- to serve the professional interests of members

- to uphold the highest ideals in the management and development of people.

The CIPD began in 1913 as the Welfare Workers' Association (WWA) with a membership of 34 people of which 29 were female. In June 1946 'The Institute of Personnel Management' (IPM) was established with a membership of 2881. The most important development in the 1970s was the start of dicussions of a merger between what was originally the Institute of Training Officers (later the Institute of Training and Development (ITD) and the IPM. However,

the issue remained unresolved until 1994 when the Institute of Personnel and Development (IPD) was formed. By 1995 the organization had become the largest body of personnel and development specialists in the world with a membership of 105,000.

Indvidual Chartered status was achieved on July 1st 2000 when the CIPD offically came into existence. The then Director General, Mr Geoff Armstrong, said: "First, it recognises the professionalism, body of knowledge and practical competence of our members. By becoming chartered we have joined the premier league of professional bodies. Second, it makes us even more of a 'must belong' body for anyone who is professionally involved in people management and development. Third, our charter means that we are recognised as a 'must consult' body by policy-makers in government and elsewhere on the whole range of people issues and work" (Armstrong 2000).

In October 2007, the CIPD appointed Jackie Orme as the new Director General to succeed Geoff Armstrong. In her opening statement at the CIPD Annual Conference in June 2008 she said: "I'm looking forward to leading the CIPD's work to develop and promote great practice in the management and development of people" (Orme, April 2008).

2.3 Membership Structure of the CIPD

Membership of the CIPD operates at six levels. An affiliate member has no formal professional qualification. They pay a subscription to become a member. Associate members must have completed a certificate level programme of study or an NVQ at level three/four. A Licentiate member must have completed 'Core Management' or an NVQ at level five. Graduate membership denotes the completion of all four fields of the Professional Development Scheme (PDS) which includes Core Management. Achievement of individual Chartered Membership (Chartered MCIPD), regarded as the 'Gold Standard', is by application, members must be graduates of the institute and be able to demonstrate three years' relevant experience at management level, two of which must be in a specific P/HRM or development role.

Chartered Fellows (Chartered FCIPD) are Chartered Members who are able to demonstrate ten years' relevant experience at management level, seven of which must be in a specific P/HRM or development role.

At both levels (MCIPD and FCIPD) the member committs to maintain their own Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but this is not prescribed in any way. They also agree to abide by the Institute's Code of Professional Conduct although there are no formal sanctions agreed by the institute to deal with recalcitrant members. Finally, the level of a Chartered Companion (CCIPD) is gained by invitation only and is awarded in recognition of a significant contribution to the profession or the institute.

2.4   Multiple Interpretations of the Function of Personnel and HRM

Personnel and HRM are not a single or unified entity; in fact Hope-Hailey (1997) described it as being such a varied and changeable function that it could be best described as resembling a Chameleon. Ferris (2004) talks about the theoretical development of HRM from Personnel. In his discussion, personnel is characterised as an administrative, procedural and transactional role while models of HRM are presented as business orientated, integrated and strategic. There are however, other commentators (Cully 1999; Boyt 2001; Buchannan et al. 2005) who do not see the change in focus as being quite as clear cut as the theoretical models might imply.

Historical analysis of the rise of the personnel function during the 20th century highlights how the function grew in popularity in response to changes in labour law, tight labour markets, and employer and state concern over worker morale and productivity (Wright 1995). During the 1970s and 1980s, the expansion of the services sector, declining trade union density, and the growing importance of skilled technical employees were also seen as contributing to the emergence of the personnel function (Kochan and Cappelli 1984; Kochan et al. 1996).

However, personnel management suffered in its status as the 'poor cousin' of the managerial professions. As Legge (1978) argued, personnel managers were engaged in a 'vicious cycle' in which they were accorded a relatively low status by senior and operational managers,

failed to be involved in the firm's strategic planning, and when personnel problems inevitably emerged, were hamstrung by the limited resources they were accorded. The marginalization of the personnel function was also related to its welfare work origins and concern with the 'human element', which conflicted with the more hard-nosed approach of production and line managers (Watson 1977). Added to this, the difficulty of demonstrating personnel's contribution to the organizational 'bottom line' (an accounting term indicting company financial profitability) was a barrier to gaining acceptance by senior management (Wright 1995).

The low status of the personnel function was reflected in weak forms of professional organization, which were incapable of controlling entry to personnel work or monopolizing personnel expertise. Indeed, Watson (2002) noted the ambivalent attitudes of personnel managers to the concept of professionalism, seeing themselves first and foremost as members of the 'management team', although also willing to adopt a professional identity as an additional means of advancement. The emergence of the discourse of human resource management (HRM) during the 1980s sought to overcome personnel management's poor reputation by promoting a vision of HR specialists as more closely aligned to the strategic imperatives of the firm and accorded a status as a key contributor to business strategy (Schuler and Jackson 1987; Beer et al. 1997).

Proponents emphasized how broader economic changes, specifically the movement towards a 'knowledge economy', necessitated a more strategic approach to the management of human resources (Ghoshal and Bartlett 1999). However, despite significant promotion by HRM practitioners of the importance of their function to business success, critics such as Legge (1995) highlighted the marked difference between the rhetoric and the reality of HRM, as well as the limitations of attempting a strategy of 'professional closure' (Farndale and Brewster 2005). So, while the discourse of HRM promoted a more strategic vision, the achievement of such a professional project has appeared far more limited in practice, leading some to characterize HRM more as a 'semi-profession' (Hodson and Sullivan 2002:300).

Over the past two decades a theoretical shift has occurred away from ideas of 'personnel Management' towards Human Resource Management (Beer et al.1884). Most notable commentators include: Armstrong (1987); Guest (1987; 1989; 2001); Keenoy (1992; 1997; 1999); Blyton and Turnbull (1992a and b); Legge (1978; 1995; 2001) and Storey (1992; 1993; 1998; 2007). These authors stress how personnel management has been characterised as basic, reactive and concerned with managing just another hard resource called people. What became clear from the literature (Tyson and Fell 1986; Tyson 1995; 2007) was the extent to which the role and status of personnel was associated with an image of a functional, procedural, operational, isolated and a rather reactive management function. Despite various attempts to classify and quantify the differences between personnel management and HRM there still remains considerable debate over what they are and if they exist at all. According to Caldwell (2003a) it is partly as a consequence of 'role ambiguities' that personnel managers have been 'past masters at reinventing or reinterpreting their role in an effort to maintain credibility and status within a changing world of work' (Caldwell 2003a:984). Personnel managers have been regarded as having a narrow, functional outlook, as Storey (1998) commented personnel management: '...has long been dogged by problems of credibility, marginality, ambiguity and a 'trash-can' labelling which has relegated it to a relatively disconnected set of duties - many of them tainted with a low-status 'welfare' connotation' (Storey 1998:5).

As indicted, the literature gave personnel a rather dated and staid image. It was therefore perhaps unsurprising that the underlying perception among the practitioners in this study was that all self-respecting individuals and organizations should strive to achieve the status and recognition of HRM rather than being left behind to practice old fashioned personnel. The mental model of a first/second class division between personnel and HRM was observed in this study. HRM was perceived as the pinnacle, while personnel represented the Cinderella of the occupation. This difference was exemplified by the practitioners from the smaller private companies who held the title 'Personnel Manager'. In the interviews each practitioner took a long time to explain to me why they were 'Personnel Managers' and not yet HR Managers'. It was almost as if they were apologising for their failure to achieve the status of

HR Managers. Their comments were designed to reassure me it was not a lack of competence or ability that prevented them from being called HR Managers; rather it was a reflection of the small size of the organization or a lack of understanding by the organization of the difference between the PM and HRM, and a lack of awareness of the contribution HRM could make that personnel could not. The implicit assumption was that they would continue to strive towards achieving the title and recognition of HRM.

Although personnel management was presented in the academic journals as a largely reactive, procedural and administrative function; with the undertone of a limited, dated and somewhat deficient model; ambitions towards HRM and claims for its superior performance and professionalism have not been uncontested. Indeed, Holmes (1997) in a rather controversial article entitled: 'W(h)ither the Personnel Profession?' proposed:

> ...we should have severe reservations about the extent to which the current dominant representation of the profession (as HRM) is likely to enhance its legitimacy and longevity. Indeed, it will lead to a diminution of the professions' legitimacy and so to a withering of the profession itself (Holmes 1997:1).

Holmes (1997) was urging restraint in the desire to abandon the personnel label in pursuit of the title HRM because he feared it would result in a loss of skill, knowledge and expertise. The argument in his paper was essentially, that the personnel profession should seek a reframing of its 'jurisdictional claims', using Abbott's framework for analysing the system of professions. The currently dominant managerialist orientation can be shown, using this analysis, to place the profession in a vulnerable position likely to lead to its withering or decline. Such an orientation, argued Holmes, is not given 'in the order of things', but is socially constructed and so open to change. Indeed, the changing political climate continues to yield an alternative trajectory for personnel work within employing organizations, namely avoiding the organizational subjugation Holmes so feard and remaining an independent, isolated and somewhat detached occupation serving the direct needs of the employees rather than the more dominant and overt business needs of the organization. A combination of these two provides for, arguably, a more sustainable future for the profession and the

professional body. In this respect, the changes required for professional education and certification do not pose major difficulties for the current arrangements. The remaining question is whether the profession, through the Institute, will engage in a thorough debate on the question: 'whither the profession?'

2.5   Personnel versus Human Resource Management

The extent to which there is any difference between personnel and Human Resource Management was a vibrant debate to which Mankin (2001) contributed by suggesting the academic search for clarity and difference was futile, unproductive and possibly unhelpful to the profession as a whole. He defined the context for P/HRM as a complementary but shifting status, identity and territory. He suggested the division between old personnel and an emergent HRM was not as clearly defined as might be perceived and that the very ambiguous and problematic nature of the concept is reflected in the variety of terms used to describe it. Yet it is this very ambiguity which provides the function with its distinctiveness. Mankin's (2001) contention is that practitioners and academics should embrace and celebrate it as an ambiguous concept. They should act as role models in order to help others embrace change and ambiguity.

Woodall (2000), in her review of work based management, lamented the limited use of critical theory and critically reflective discourse in challenging dominant thinking within the field. In theory and practice, issues such as pace of change, globalization, the knowledge economy, and technological evolution continue to highlight the central role of ongoing change, and that rather than attempting to straight jacket the function, variation and complexity should be exulted. Many others, for example Hatcher (1999); Holton (2003) and Lynham (2002), are also seen to assert the need to allow change and variation to contribute and shape the development of new theoretical perspectives and so to influence practice. Equally, Dansereau, Yammarino and Kohles (1999) and Morgeson and Hofmann (1999), argued that through engaging in multilevel research, our ability to choose better lenses, to focus on phenomena, and to capture images of people shifting and organizing themselves will be enhanced. Different perspectives produce diverse individual, organizational, societal, and

global outcomes. Adopting a multiple perspectives approach recognizes the extent to which the function's moving, complex and contextual nature resulted in the creation of a menu of intervention options and empowering innovative and critical thinking about its value, processes and potential beneficiaries.

While accepting the evolutionary nature of the function Caldwell (2003) was nonetheless interested to determine how such changes might be affecting the nature and role of personnel and HRM managers in the UK. Using survey data from 98 practitioners, Caldwell revealed that personnel roles had altered in a number of significant respects becoming multifaceted and complex but retaining negative counter-images of the past. Initial indicative data from this study supported the suggestion that personnel type activities were evolving to represent a more integrated service labelled HRM. Where this was occurring practitioners were demonstrating an awareness of the changes required and an ability to acquire a new skills set to enable them to cope with role ambiguity. Storey (2007:7) believes HRM: "...seeks to achieve a competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce using an array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques".

The emphasis of HRM is, I suggest, different to that of personnel. If personnel management is about individual interpersonal skills, about being reactive and responsive to the needs of the employees, and not necessarily the wider needs of the business, about being relatively isolated from business decisions and being concerned with effective administration and procedural compliance with legal requirements; then it is different to HRM. HRM is concerned with strategic integration, long term planning and the devolution of routine duties and responsibilities to line management (Torrington and Hall 1989). Losey (1998) talks of 'HR Coming of Age', as though HRM signifies a passing of time during which personnel was still 'growing up'. Storey (1992) has also established a theoretical model based on his perception of how organizations have evolved from predominant personnel practices to HRM practices; he called it 'a model of the shift to human resource management'.

His model was based on ideal types, so arguably no organization conforms wholly to the picture, but his work was valuable in identifying twenty-seven points of difference between personnel and HRM. His approach defined four elements which distinguished HRM:

- That it is human capability and commitment, which, in the final analyses, distinguish successful organizations

- Because HRM is of strategic importance, it needs to be considered by top management in the formulation of the corporate plan

- HRM is therefore seen to have long-term implications and to be integral to the core performance of the business or public sector organization

- The key levers (the deployment of human resources, evaluation of performance and the rewarding of it, etc) are to be used to seek not merely compliance but commitment.

Storey (1992) distinguished four principles of HRM, namely: beliefs and assumptions, strategic concepts, line management and key levers. Through the beliefs and assumptions HRM epitomises an aim to go beyond contract to secure a more unitarist approach in employee relations. In strategic aspects he noted a focus on developing task and skill flexibility among staff, a heightened sense of organizational commitment, a more transformational leadership style and a concern for profitability, business success and a strong desire to operate as an equal business partner. Finally, Storey (1992) noted, that in the 'key levers' the most significant feature was individualism within the employment relationship area. The other key levers were selection according to attributes, performance pay, individual contracts, enhanced flows of information, teamwork and an emphasis on organizational culture and climate. Heery and Noon (2001) summarise the debate suggesting it is the concern for strategy and the focus on business outcomes and success which are the most pervasive characteristics of HRM and are those that are seen to make HRM distinct from personnel management.

Debates about difference and role change have also been captured in CIPD publications (CIPD 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007a; 2007b) addressing the changing nature of the HRM function and the likely consequences for practitioners (CIPD 2005a; 2005b; 2006b). For

example, whilst recognising that the idea of HRM as a business partner has become the most attractive role for HRM practitioners to aspire to, they also note that finding people of the right calibre and with the right skill set and competencies for fulfilling such a role may be rather more problematic.

Authors such as Francis and Keegan (2006); Gilmore and Williams (2007) and Kochan (2004; 2007) are clearly critical of HRM's shift to a business partner role, advocating instead a much more pluralist view of HRM to ensure a healthy and sustainable balance of power in organizations. For Francis and Keegan (2006) and Gilmore and Williams (2007), there are concerns that the synonymity between the notions of the business partner produces a particular view of what the CIPD should seek to achieve with its professional standards and their impact on aspiring HRM professionals.

This professional dilemma – on the one hand wanting to become a central player in the organization while on the other hand recognising a need for maintaining professional distinctiveness, was an emerging theme in my study. Practitioners, in particular from the larger private organizations, spoke of the subtle pressures placed on them to make and enact decisions in support of the business needs when they were aware of alternative options which would not have such an adverse effect on the lives of the individual employees. The pressure on HRM to internalise and respond to business values and become more business orientated was a compelling theme in the literature. Schlesinger (2002), Evetts (2006a; 2006b) and Kuhlman (2006) suggest that although professions aim to control and enhance their legitimacy and status they are, in fact, losing their monopoly and control to employers.

Hiltrop et al. (1995) had previously witnessed similar scenarios being played out in Europe. They had examined what was happening to the P/HRM role in European companies and revealed how functional aspects of the work were devolved to line and general managers while HRM professionals were required to become more business orientated. They examined how European HR Managers tried to combine the dual role of specialist HR adviser with the need to gain and demonstrate broader business experience and skills. The HR practitioners

themselves were becoming instrumental in the implementation of innovative business strategies, acting as the 'voice' of the management in their relationship with the line. In the European companies Hiltrop et al. (1995) studied the new role of 'business advocate' (Dunphy and Stace 1992; Morehead et al. 1997) resulted in a further decentralisation of HR responsibilities requiring new business skills of political negotiation, advocacy, liaison and self promotion. These skills had not previously been associated with the role of personnel and provided yet further confirmation of the extent to which the role and function of personnel had evolved into something markedly different.

In the practice of personnel management this was reflected in the theoretical development of models of HRM (Legge 1978; Huselid 1997; Boxall 1996; Boxall and Purcell 2003). This was significant in the history of personnel and HRM because for the first time HRM was clearly differentiated from the traditional and administrative functions associated with personnel management. Secondly, despite his own warnings against evolutionary interpretations of HRM, Storey's (1992) characterisation of the strategic business partnering role cast it as aspirational with the consequence that for many HRM practitioners and organizations, HRM became a 'sexy boardroom must have'.

2.6   Human Resource Management as a Profession

The status of human resource management and its standing as a managerial profession has been a recurring concern for practitioners over time. The positioning of the HRM function as a key organizational player (Dunn 1990; Hart 1993) is still proving very attractive to HRM professionals and the term 'Business Partner' is increasingly popular in HRM lexicon (Wright 2008). Commentators (Caldwell 2003a; 2003b) have emphasized the need for the reinvigoration of the HRM profession through a focus on its ethical and social contribution (Kochan 2004), others have championed the contrasting need for HR managers to better demonstrate their ability to 'deliver value' to managers and shareholders by reconceptualizing their role as 'strategic' or 'business partners' to senior managers (Beer 1997; Ulrich 1997; Lawler and Mohrman 2003; Kenton and Yarnall 2005; Robinson and Robinson 2005; Ulrich and Brockbank 2005; Hunter et al. 2006). In recent years, a normative discourse has

developed which asserts that the path to improved status for HR 'professionals' involves reinvention of their role as 'business partners' promoting enterprise and competitiveness. Implicit within this discourse is a reinterpretation of the role of the HR manager as less an administrative functionary and more an 'internal consultant' advising on the contribution of people management to firm competitiveness and advocating organizational change (Kenton and Moody 2003). This process of redefinition is argued to represent the latest in a series of strategies aimed at improving the status of the HRM profession (Caldwell 2001; 2003a; 2007).

The theoretical modelling of personnel and HRM is relevant to this study because it illustrates the continuing variation in role content and orientation that exists even within the function of HRM. The recasting of HR managers as 'business partners' and 'internal consultants' highlights some of the paradoxes and contradictions of contemporary managerial work. On the one hand, as respondents to this study highlight, the rhetoric and discourse of business partnership and internal consultancy clearly links to the main elements of the new strategic HRM (Ulrich 1997; 1998; Ulrich and Brockbank 2005). Rather than being seen as a 'service provider' or administrative functionary, most of the respondents to this study emphasized the perception of 'trusted adviser' and 'change agent' which stressed a more strategic focus and increased organizational legitimacy (Caldwell 2003a). As will be explored in more detail later, the findings from my research suggest that while many practitioners gained self-esteem and organizational status from the identity and role of business partner, it did not equate to a broader identity as a member of an HRM 'profession'.

2.7   Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the changing role of P/HRM practitioners, It described how as practitioners embed themselves in the vagaries of organizational politics and business outcomes, and undertake their role as business partner and internal consultant, some have been simultaneously required to leave aside personal ambitions 'help people' and instead act as the representative of the organization. Their personal values often being tempered by and in some cases subjugated to, the financial, commercial and economic priorities of the business. Hence, Kochan (2004:134) argued the move from personnel to strategic HRM has

involved a realignment of occupational identity from seeking to balance employee and firm interests as 'stewards of the social contract', to more closely aligning with the interests of senior executives as 'partners' in the creation of firm value. As a result, the pleas from Kenton and Moody (2003) and Robinson and Robinson (2005) to develop superior influencing, relationship and networking skills were well founded.

However, despite promotion by HRM practitioners of the importance of their function to business success, critics such as Farndale and Brewster (2005) highlighted the limitations of a strategy of professional closure while Frase-Blunt (2004) pointed to the fact that the development of specialisms is driving a process of fragmentation and 'balkanization' of the profession. In this sense, the move towards strategic HRM is seen as contributing to a deprofessionalization of HRM, in that the occupation loses its broader social purpose and becomes simply an agent of capital. By contrast, Ulrich's (1997; 1998) depiction of a renewed HRM profession overcoming its beleaguered reputation, stresses the importance of an even closer integration with the business organization by delivering 'results' and 'achieving organizational excellence' (Ulrich 1998:124).

This chapter has emphasised how competing demands from multiple sovereigns and how challenges to status, professional knowledge and jurisdictional boundaries are serving to redefine the business context within P/HRM operates and, as a consequence has located the profession at a cross roads. One path way leads to a possible deprofessionalisation while the other appears to offer new opportunities to establish the function as an equal and strategic business partner.

Chapter Three   A Review of the Literature

3.1   Chapter Overview

The purpose of chapter three is to review the literature relating to the sociology of the professions that is relevant to the research topic and research questions associated with the study. The review also considers the contribution made by organizational theory. The chapter identifies themes and concepts which facilitated the development of the conceptual framework that determined the research approach. This chapter concentrates on reviewing literature that provides a sociological perspective on the professions. The themes in the chapter are *perceptions of* and *evolution in* the professions and their contemporary relevance to the occupation.

3.2   Professional Strategies

A central strategy for many managerial occupations, including personnel and HRM has been the process of professionalization. Functionalist depictions of professions stress the attributes of abstract specialized knowledge gained through formal education, the certification of practitioners via an occupational association, ethical rules, an orientation of client service, and societal recognition of the occupation's authority resulting in significant job autonomy (Goode 1969).

By contrast critics have focused less on the specific characteristics of a profession and viewed the concept of profession as the outcome of an occupational strategy aimed at gaining monopoly, control over work and exercising power over others (Abbott 1988; Friedson 1983; Larson 1977; Van Maanen and Barley 1984). As Armstrong (1986; 1987) argued, unlike established professions such as law and medicine, the 'managerial professions' (such as personnel), exist largely within business organizations and compete for status and control by demonstrating how their specific expertise links to the resolution of business problems. In these cases, the autonomy and authority of the occupational group relates to its power and status within the business organization, that is, 'to be numbered amongst the controllers rather than the controlled' (Armstrong 1986:25).

Hence there is a paradox regarding the autonomy of the professions, in that to gain legitimacy as experts they must demonstrate to senior managers how their expertise contributes to organizational goals, that they are in effect valuable 'servants of power' (Wright 2008). However, to be successful in achieving such authority, these specialisms not only need to identify a key business problem and highlight how their expertise alone can solve it, but in addition must maintain control over their expertise and prevent rivals from usurping or annexing their knowledge. This chapter reviews the range of differing strategies employed by occupations striving towards professional recognition.

'Professionalism' is a concept used most widely in the context of the evolution of an occupation (Aucoin 1993). Both the meaning of the term and the occupations that might be described as professions have changed over time and members of professions have energetically propagated their own definitions of what they are, what they are doing and what it is that entitles them to be called a profession:

> There can be few areas of social enquiry that have become so involved, distracted and perplexed by matters of definition than the study of the professions. The reasons for these difficulties are fairly clear. Both the meaning of the term, and the occupations that might be described as professions, have changed over time, and members of professions have energetically propagated their own definitions of what they are, what they are doing and what it is that entitles them to be called a profession (Burrage et al.1990:204).

3.3 The Sociology of the Professions

The sociology of the professions offers a wide range of different and contrasting views of how and why professions exist. The first approach, trait theory, was selected as appropriate because it reflects an established view of the professions. The second approach explains the professions in terms of power and privileges. The third approach regards the professions as the result of a process of enactment during which they acquire status and public acknowledgement as a profession. This approach is considered relevant because it reflects stages in the development of P/HRM as it aspires to secure recognition as a profession. The

fourth approach represents the professions as a professional project. The focus is on the collective endeavours of the occupation, it does not focus on the individual.

3.3.1 Trait Theories

Interest in the professions in the 1930s began with an attempt to identify the defining characteristics or traits that distinguished the professions from other occupations and resulted in the development of what is referred to as the trait perspective (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Parsons 1939; 1951; Goode 1969). Based on the 'established' professions of medicine, law and theology as described by Becker (1962; 1970) and Millerson (1964) the most commonly cited traits were:

- the acquisition of a skill based on abstract knowledge
- the provision of training and education, usually associated with a university
- certification based on competency testing
- the development of a formal organization
- adherence to a code of conduct.

Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and in particular Goode (1969) identified a similar framework for the study of the professions in the UK which reinforced the idea of a set of traits but their work emphasised: 'offering a service to the community' and 'acknowledgement by others that the occupation is regarded as a profession'. Parsons (1939) identified similar traits that served to unite a profession, including a code of ethics, a single qualifying point of entry, strong professional association and control of knowledge. However, to distinguish his list from that of others Parsons (1951) drew attention to the ability of the occupation to monopolise a particular market, citing this as the defining characteristic of a profession. Parsons (1939) was interested to understand whether members of the professions were motivated by self interest and financial gain or by a genuine desire to serve the community as was noted by Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933). Although Parsons concluded it was hard to tell, he did note their behaviour was affected by those they served and suggested this placed professions under 'subtle social pressures' to behave in a certain way concluding professions:

- were able to ensure their income was greater than the average lay person and was protected by virtue of their monopoly

- were controlled by social mechanism and technical competence for the sake of the client

- were considered professional in a bureaucratic structure in the sense of having power and authority over others and so possessing a degree of social control (Parsons 1939:459).

The work of Parsons, like that of Greenwood (1957) made a particular contribution through their discussion of codes of conduct which were described as being 'explicit, systematic and binding' (Greenwood 1957:51). The existence of a code of conduct became increasingly significant in work on defining professions, an example being Millerson (1964) who prioritised the need for a professional code of conduct in the development of any profession. Greenwood (1957) noted that professions often function on an informal or a formal basis forming a subculture within larger society, but that members were imbued with a strong sense of responsibility and were governed by:

- self regulation

- systematic theory

- authority

- community sanction

- ethical codes

- culture.

(Greenwood 1957:51)

The importance of ethical codes and a social obligation to serve the community were fundamental characteristics of the established professions (Parsons 1939; Wilensky 1964). Where there was any possible conflict, professionals were expected to subordinate personal gain, and even today some professions such as law, recognise explicitly in their professional code of conduct an obligation to provide pro bono services to the needy members of the community (Strossen 1993). Although this philanthropic gesture is not offered by the PI/HRM

community, the concept of obligation does have an interesting applicability because the idea assumes there is a clear benefactor – for example in the case of medicine the obligation is always to the patient, but in P/HRM the relationship is less clearly defined as it always involves at least four actors: the individual practitioner, the employing organization, other employees within the organization and the CIPD as the Professional Institute. The emphasis of self as the mediator of professional conduct became a recurring theme in this work and in the context of defining professionalism assumed a greater significance than many of the traits detailed in this section.

3.3.2 Trait Theory Applied to Personnel/HRM

Some of the traits described here, for example, the development of a formal association, the provision of training and education are evident in the occupation. For example, the CIPD does not operate a licence to practice and although the CIPD does have a code of conduct, there is little formal monitoring of the extent to which members adhere to the code. The trait approach is valuable because it provides an insight into how the professions were characterised, however, is not without its critics. Taxonomic classifications such as this rely on generic definitions of 'professionalism' irrespective of place or time and marginalize the social and cultural aspects which are central to understanding what constitutes a profession. Critics including Dingwall (1976) and Larson (1977) have argued that treating professions simply as a 'given' or as a 'matter of degree' was problematic and the prescriptive traits-based approach to the professions obscured the social and historical conditions under which occupational groups became professions. Crompton (1990) argued that such an approach is '...no more than a static, uncritical rendering of an idealised account of the basic features of [American] society, an account which obscured the underlying tensions and conflicts with which society was actually riven' (Crompton 1990:153). While Roth (1974) argued the trait approach did no more than take on board the professions' own idealised images of themselves and acted as the sociologists' decoy.

3.3.3   Limitations of Trait Theory

While representing an important foundation for the study of the professions, trait-based research suffered from various shortcomings. One: there was limited agreement about which traits were central and which were peripheral, or which earned the professional the right to professional status. Two: trait-based studies were criticized by Roth (1974), Dingwell (1976) and Larson (1977) for being 'atheoretical' and 'ahistorical'; in other words, for merely reflecting the characteristics of the professions at the time. Such studies were undertaken with no consideration of the applicability of the traits in altered economic, social or cultural contexts. Three: the trait-based approach failed to challenge certain occupations' claims to privileged status or to understand how they utilized power to achieve and defend their position. Four: the traits by themselves were unable to help determine whether a particular occupation could claim to be a profession or not. Despite its limitations, the work of early sociologists such as Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) and Parsons (1939) is valuable as a socio-historical approach which has contributed to understanding occupational structure in industrial societies in the West.

3.4   Power Perspective

The 'power approach' was an evolutionary stage in theorising on the professions which united theorists who rejected the concept of professionalism as a value system in favour of a critical assessment of professions as elite conspiracies of powerful occupational workers (Evetts 2003b:401). Power perspectives of the professions reframed the central questions of why and how do the professions exist to focus on why *certain* occupations have succeeded in persuading society to accord them professional power whilst others have failed in this endeavour. Power-based researchers suggested that certain occupations had greater potential to exercise their professional power because they were associated with particularly acute and uncertain problems, or where a 'client's judgment was ineffective' (Dietrich and Roberts 1997:23). From this perspective it was argued (Johnson 1972) that professionals deliberately sought to increase levels of uncertainty and to engage in processes of language and knowledge mystification in order to increase social distance from their clients and from other occupations. The rewards were the ability to exercise social control by creating

preferential market institutions. The test of professional status was not esoteric expertise and an altruistic sense of vocation, but autonomy from state control and the maintenance of monopolistic barriers to entry. Power theorists such as Johnson (1972) regarded 'professionalisation' as a political process of gaining greater occupational control over work, and were interested in the role of power in establishing and maintaining that control. Johnson (1972) promoted the analysis of 'professional occupations' in terms of their 'power relations in society - their sources of power and authority and the ways in which they use them' (Johnson 1972:23).

Evidently influenced by the early works of power theorists such as Johnson (1972), Freidson (1973; 1984; 1994), and Kelgon (1978) also maintained that to understand the dynamics of professionalism it was necessary to examine the relationship between the occupation and its practitioners to other aspects of the social structure. Capturing a central theme of the power paradigm, Kelgon (1978) argued that occupational sources of power, or resources, were best seen not as isolated within the occupation itself, but as stemming from linkages to the wider social structure (Kelgon 1978:272). Kelgon (1978) urged an understanding of organizational power and control over the professions as bound up with other social forces and arrangements of power (Kelgon 1978:271). For Kelgon the successful use of a 'professionalising strategy' depended on the sources of power that allowed an occupation to gain and maintain professional recognition or what he referred to as the 'external dynamic' of professionalism:

> From the perspective of the external dynamic, it is the relationship of an occupation to social arrangements of power, and the way in which those relationships affect the social meaning of an occupation, that affect the ability of an occupation to obtain and maintain professional occupational control (Kelgon 1978:273).

3.4.1 Power Theory Applied to Personnel/HRM

The function of PI/HRM has few of the accepted hallmarks of power. It does not have monopolistic barriers to entry, deal with clients whose problems are acute or uncertain, or have claim to special privileges – social or financial. It would therefore be possible to dismiss

this as an irrelevant approach. But, in emphasizing the power relationship between the work organization and the occupation this approach has a degree of utility in explaining what is occurring in P/HRM. In this study the ability of the organization to shape and influence the practitioners' values and behaviour was a crucial determinant of the professional credibility of the function. If the organizational structures permitted the function a seat on the board and if the individual practitioner demonstrated the political skills of a business partner the status of the function was considerably enhanced. In this study, in larger private Multinational Companies (MNCs) where practitioner's demonstrated strategic business values the credibility and image of HRM was elevated to equal that of accounts and marketing. In other organizations, such as small private concerns, the structure of the organization was limited and frequently left the function operating at the level of personnel, which attracted limited credibility or status.

3.5   Process Approaches

Addressing the shortcomings of the trait and power approaches, Caplow (1954) and later Wilensky (1964) modelled the development of the professions as progression through defined stages. Caplow's (1954) conceptualisation proposed that first, a professional association is formed, second, the group changes its name in an attempt to change the image and identity of the occupation (hence personnel to HRM). Third, a code of conduct or ethics is established. Fourth is political agitation and attainment of legal restrictions on who may perform the services for which the occupation lays claim as their exclusive domain. The establishment of training facilities, controlled either directly or indirectly by the occupation in question, is seen to occur concurrently with the earlier stages in the professionalisation process (Caplow 1954).

3.5.1   Process Theory Applied to Personnel/HRM

The function has realised most of the above criteria. It has a Professional Institute – the CIPD. It has a code of conduct. It has 135 (CIPD September 2008) education and training facilities. It is gradually changing its image and developing a new skills set to support a re-branding from personnel to HRM. A change of name has been significant in the evolution of other

aspiring occupations: classroom assistants (Dannels 2000; Squires 2001), nurses (Cowin 2001) and social workers (Cannan 1995; Davis 2002; Forte 2004; Hughes 2006). And yet the occupation is still not universally regarded as a profession.

In theorizing why this might be so, my initial analysis of study data indicates it is related to several themes. First: practitioners focus on attaining individual professional recognition limits the collective process of professionalisation. Second: the employing organization has a strong influence on the role and status of the function and this varies between organizations. As a consequence this further erodes any sense of collective unity or identity. Third, because there are no legal restrictions as to who may undertake P/HRM work anyone – qualified or unqualified - may practice. The occupation is therefore perceived by some as being open to anyone, unregulated and weak, and so by definition not a profession. The lack of recognition as a profession is further fuelled by the perceived weakness of the Professional Institute to enforce a regulatory code of conduct.

In this study these factors were also cited by respondents as adversely affecting perceptions of the occupation as a profession.

3.5.2 Limitations of Process Theory

Process theories of professionalisation offered by Caplow (1954) and Wilensky (1964) can be critiqued for being too rigid and linear in their assessment of professional evolution. The stages risk becoming too prescriptive and thereby imply a deficiency in the evolution of aspiring occupations if they miss out a stage or 'deviate' from the models. The approach implies a carte blanche freedom from context and views them as existing in a social, economic and political vacuum – which clearly they do not. Treating professions as isolated entities free from external influence is to ignore the very processes that have stimulated (or inhibited) their diversity. As a consequence Pemberton and Boreham (1976) problematised the process approach for:

...its failure to scrutinize professional ideologies, leading to a mystification of the process through which the rhetoric concerning exclusive domains and altruism became self-serving' (Pemberton and Boreham 1976:19).

Larson (1977) was one of the sociologists who reoriented the analysis. She depicted the professions as interest groups linked to the class system of capitalist society. She analysed professionalisation as a 'collective mobility project' in which occupations sought to improve their economic position and social standing or prestige. Drawing on Freidson's work from 1973, Larson viewed professionalisation as the construction of a market in professional commodities or services and was interested in:

> ... how particular groups of people attempt to negotiate the boundaries of an area in the social division of labour and establish their control over it (Larson 1977:xii).

Thus, professionalisation was conceptualised as:

> the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute and control a market for their expertise ... [and] also as a collective assertion of social status and as a collective process of upward mobility (Larson 1977:xii).

3.6   The Professional Project Theory

As evidenced in the preceding sections, a great deal of work on the professions had been dominated by the attempt to provide a universal definition of what constituted the foundations of professionalism. Hanlon (1999) regretted this as sterile and lamented the link that had been wasted on semantic nuances, after all, he stated:

> professionalism is not a static concept but the product of a dialectical relationship with its environment (Hanlon 1999:3).

Despite Hanlon's reservations the past thirty to forty years have witnessed the study of the professions and of professionalism move beyond its earlier concern with classification and taxonomy. It is now more concerned with the processes through which occupations pursue, negotiate and maintain professionalism. At the heart lies the concept of the professional project (Larson 1977; Abbott 1988). A systematic attempt by occupations to use a scarce set of cultural and technical resources (essentially the specific body of knowledge and skills

possessed by the practitioners) to gain a hold over the way in which that knowledge and skill is gained in the first instance (essentially by controlling access to the occupation) and made available to others generating financial rewards (or sold at a profit) to pave the way for collective mobility and social advancement. Using the 'professional project' as a conceptual tool usefully established the 'concrete and historically bounded character of professionals as empirical entities' (Witz 1992:64).

Following from this, different occupations, due to their own individual circumstances, may present different stages, as well as different patterns of professionalisation. Law, for example, together with medicine, represents the archetypal model of the 'established professions' (Freidson 1983). They combine the formal traits traditionally associated with professionalism, to provide an authoritative example and benchmark for occupations embarking on professional projects (Etzioni 1969; Johnson 1972). Other occupations such as teaching (Walker 2001; Trigwell et al. 1994; Trigwell and Prosser 1997; Trigwell and Ashwin 2005; Trigwell 1997; 2000; 2006), nursing (Ohlen 1988; Allen 2001; Sjöström 2002) and arguably PI/HRM have, by comparison, been treated as 'semi', 'emerging' (Etzioni 1969) or, in the words of respondents from this study 'aspiring professions'.

As we have seen, although PI/HRM presents some of the structural and organizational characteristics associated with the trait based approach (MacDonald 1995), in comparison to law or medicine it enjoys less autonomy over its work (Ram 1999; Eaton–Walley and Lowe 2004), less control over its knowledge base (Despres and Hiltrop 1995; Kamoache 2007) and has a weaker professional institution and governance, not to mention less rewards and social status. Therefore, by comparison PI/HRM appears as an incomplete or subordinate professional project. However, despite the deficiencies noted above, respondents in this study were reluctant to regard the occupation as not a profession, they entertained professional ambitions and preferred to regard it as an 'aspiring profession' –or as one respondent noted: "not quite there yet".

In defining whether P/HRM was a profession respondents employed a slightly modified set of characteristics and parameters, and rather than focus on a deficit model they viewed the process of gaining professional recognition as an individual project of the self, which would be accomplished through a sustained tactical campaign of strategic alliances, primarily developed within their employing organizations, the acquisition of a business specific knowledge and the development of a new skills set which focussed on negotiation, communication and promotion of both self and the PI/HRM function.

3.6.1 Professional Project Theory Applied to Personnel/HRM

The professional project is represented as a fluid, dynamic and contested process rooted in and contingent upon negotiations between distinct actors (Neal 2000). In this research the actors were represented by the employing organization, the individual practitioner and the Professional Institute. Seal (1996) suggested part of the project was concerned with controlling the professional market, defining those eligible to join the project and identifying with the regulatory power of the State (Seal et al. 1996). This allowed the project to exclude the incompetent, the undesirable or simply the social outsider. Such exclusionary mechanisms were continued and reinforced through the defensive strategies, ingrained beliefs and everyday practices of those who hold power in these institutions (Davies 1996; Witz 1992). Restricted entry, shared professional ambitions, aspirations of power, influence and social mobility as key features of the professional project were not identified as characterising P/HRM. Respondents did not relate to this description of a collective professional project. Some did however, relate to elements of the project – status, ambition and influence – at the level of the individual – not the level of the collective.

Abbott (1988) regarded the professions as an interdependent system where jurisdictional boundaries were in perpetual dispute. In his study he too reformulated the question of the professions and rather than focusing on why certain occupations succeed in gaining professional status, he focused on the dynamics between occupations competing for professional status. 'Closure', or in other words, how an occupation organised itself in order to close or regulate access to the occupation was, he suggested, concerned with: knowledge,

education, training, markets, services and jobs. 'Closure' has been noted as an important mechanism whereby certain professionals are able to defend and maintain their privileged position relative to others. Abbott (1988) suggested that in order to achieve 'social closure' or 'market shelter' as Freidson (1973; 1983; 1984) preferred to call it, professions must adopt various strategies, including the dissemination of a professionalizing rhetoric in a variety of forms and venues and become involved in social actions designed to influence public opinion and legislatures:

> ....a fundamental fact of professional life [is] interprofessional competition.....It is the history of jurisdictional disputes that is the real issue determining the history of the professions (Abbott 1988:2).

Abbotts (1988) portrayal of the professions as a 'system', invoking images of structure, function, isolation, intentionality, planning and legislative control seems to contradict, even deny, the overriding dynamics of professions as competing and fighting for market supremacy. Yet the characterisation of a 'systematic approach' reflects the strategy currently employed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The CIPD has a clear mission (CIPD Annual Report 2008) to engage with employers, to become increasingly active in research, to review the professional qualification structure, to restructure membership levels and grades and to increase total membership numbers. In this respect the CIPD has clearly articulated its professional project aims, and has, in all senses of the word, an approach that mirrors the process described by Abbott (1988) in his work on 'The System of the Professions'. Lamont and Molnar (2002) argue this is a positive development for occupations seeking to achieve recognition as a profession for example social work, suggesting it represents:...paths for further developments (Lamont and Molnar 2002:169).

The interpretation of the professions as a project, planned and led by a particular occupational group who closed markets, dominated and controlled other occupations and 'captured states to negotiate regulative bargains' (Evetts 2003b:22) provided a radically different perspective from that which had preceded. In part, this is because it drew attention to the rather dominant and manipulative aspects of the process and in part because it

positioned the development of a profession as the consequence of a deliberate strategy rather than the more random outcome of social/cultural evolution.

3.6.2   Limitations of the Professional Project/Systems Theory

As a conceptual model the professional project locates the power to determine the outcome in the hands of the practitioners. It presumes a freedom to act that is unimpeded by political, social, cultural or legal considerations and portrays the profession as acting in harmony with or independently of other agents, such as other professions and employing organizations. This juxtaposition between professional freedom and organizational accountability serves to highlight a further thread we need to consider in our review of the professions. The portrayal of professionalism in trait or process approaches presents them as unitary forces with a universally accepted professional vision and with collective and united ambitions for the advancement of their status.

The mordant potential for disunity both between different sectors of the same professional function, for example between the specialist areas of training and employment law, is an aspect that is sometimes missing in sociological analysis. Issues of occupational dominance, or challenges from other occupations and internal conflicts do not seem present in the literature. For example, a requirement by a Professional Institute for its members to engage in activities relating to continuing professional development, this may require the employing organization to provide additional training and support including time during the working day.

In this study the employing organization, in particular the larger private companies, defined roles, determined the work boundaries of the practitioners and, as a direct consequence, influenced the position and status of the function to a much greater extent than the Professional Institution.

3.7 Professions, Interaction and the Individual

The professional project as an explanation of how occupations achieve professional status emphasised the intention of the occupation to plan, resource and execute a strategy specifically designed to enhance professional status. It assumed the occupation was relatively independent, autonomous to act, and free from external influences such as those of the employing organization. It assumed the individual member was subservient to the whole and ignored or at least played down, the individual ambitions of the practitioner, or what I later refer to as the 'professional project of the self'. Morrell (2004) used this shift in focus from the occupational group to the individual as the basis from which to argue that attempts to fix ideas of profession or indeed the process of professionalisation were futile, in much the same way Hanlon had in 1999. Morrell (2004) argued that attempts to standardize or define professions were limited because they failed to acknowledge the importance of 'individual' and 'interaction'. Drawing from a range of studies he established three levels of individual interaction as key:

- First, the way in which professional knowledge is constructed as an element of a discursive practice (Foucault 1977a and b; Katz 1984; Abbott 1988; Friedson 1988; Joseph 1994; McLaughlin 2001).

- Second, the way in which professional roles are negotiated and constructed within and across organizational boundaries (Exworthy and Halford 1999; Forbes and Prime 1999).

- Third, the role the professions play in creating and maintaining systems of value and power (Johnson 1972; Macdonald 1995).

Morrell (2004) stressed the need to place an emphasis on 'the complexity and innate messiness in the occupational, organizational and social contexts of professional work' (Morrell 2004:23). This, he asserted, represented a shift away from trait accounts of professional and went beyond simple process accounts of professionalisation. Both of these he regarded as a legacy of functionalism, while his interactionist perspective redirected analysis towards the relationally constructed nature of a profession, through the lenses of knowledge, organization and power (Morrell 2004:23).

The interaction between the three dimensions of knowledge, organization and power are evidenced in this study, although the emphasis here is primarily concerned with the way in which the organization exerts its power to interact with and define the type of knowledge the required by the individual requires and how it is deployed.

As Flynn noted: ...there are fundamental contradictions between the logics and rationalities of managerialism and professionalism which create conflict and problems (Flynn 1999:35). Pointing to an increased managerial prerogative with an emphasis on economy, efficiency and effectiveness Flynn believed that through their working practices many organizations may actually challenge the role and place of the professions because the employing organization preferred to control professional behaviour, culture and working boundaries.

Despite the rather fatalistic overtone of his observations, Flynn's findings do have some resonance with my initial findings. Larger private organizations did seem to interact with HRM in a way that was constructed differently to the interaction in smaller organizations and in the public sector. The difference seemed to lie in the way the function was able to demonstrate its ability to contribute to the profit margin, described by Kitay (2007) as being one of the most significant differentiators of organizational success. This demonstration was linked to the combined skills of the individual practitioner to acquire a sound knowledge of the specific business and promote both themselves and the HRM Function. It also relied on a concomitant acceptance by the other senior business managers to acknowledge and trust in the contribution of HR practitioners and capitalise on HRM's potential to contribute to business success.

The professional project has provided an explanatory model which emphasised the collective intention of an occupation to plan for and ultimately achieve recognition and public acceptance as a profession. The professional project emphasised the collective unity of the occupation and acknowledged the interaction and significance of power and knowledge as factors which influenced the evolution of the project.

3.8 Emerging Theories

Thus far the review has offered an overview of four approaches to the professions which focused on identifying discernable traits, as a demonstration of power, as a process or as a professional project. In the analysis of the professional project two aspects in particular were identified as significant. First, the role of the employing organization in influencing the work and boundaries and so the status of the occupation within the organization and two, the role of the individual practitioner in seeking recognition as a professional in their own right, irrespective of the collective endeavours of the professional project or the Professional Institution.

3.8.1 Organizational Theory

As will be seen there are tight connections between this body of work and the current position of P/HRM in work organizations. The combination of the organization, the individual and the Professional Institute resonate with the neo-institutionalist perspective held by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) who viewed professionals as key institutional agents in society, promulgating rules and principles of apparently universal applicability. This resulted in what they referred to as isomorphism within organizational and professional institutions.

Evidence of interaction between occupational and organizational change having an impact on the role and function of PI/HRM profession comes from Dent (2002a and b; 2003; 2005) who provided an overview of the changing relationship with the Government between various professions including human resources, medicine and nursing highlighting the role of government in reproducing a disciplined profession by conveying 'legislator' roles on elite elements in the profession. However as McClelland (1990:107) noted, any change in role as a result of changing organizational pressures was not new. In describing the process he distinguished between professionalisation 'from within' (successful monopolisation of the market by an occupational group) and professionalisation 'from above' (the domination of forces outside the occupation). The government, because it has the power to impose regulations, was an example of an external force exerting pressure from above.

Observing a growth in measures of control Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2003b; 2006a and b) suggested the role of the organization in influencing and defining professional behaviour is increasing to the extent they regard 'professionalism' as a label that organizations apply to their internal activities in order to mask a subversive form of organizational control over the actions, work roles and conduct of their employees. Ackroyd (1996), Ackroyd and Muzio (2004) agree with their assertions, suggesting the professions in the United Kingdom are responding to attempts by employing organizations to control the internal professional labour market by becoming encapsulated groups or quasi organizations within formal organizations. He developed his argument through a consideration of the contemporary situation of professionals in the manufacturing industry and the public services, where he observed 'new model' professions successfully establishing themselves. Contemporary management of the professions he indicated would involve encapsulating professional groups within the remit of the organization rather than by re-constructing them as completely irrelevant to the needs of the employing organization.

Gray and Clegg (2003) saw the need for 'individual responsibilisation' as a consequence of being 'encapsulated' within organizations. They saw being part of a profession as being about ways of conducting oneself rather than with possession of technical knowledge or being certified to practice. Maintaining that as a consequence of increased expectations to deliver 'value' for the employing organization and meet their expressed and codified demands, practitioners experienced tensions in managing allegiance to the organization, to the profession as a collective, to the Professional Institute and to themselves as individuals.

In these circumstances the knowledge required by the individual practitioner to undertake their role effectively was determined by the organization and did not always reflect the distinctive body of knowledge the Professional Institute deemed to be appropriate. The acquisition of specific organizational and business knowledge emerged as a strong theme in this study. Respondents in large Multinational Companies (MNCs) spoke of the link between pressure to develop greater business knowledge and awareness, opportunities for personal

career progression and the status accorded to the function. There was a sense in which allegiance to the organization outweighed allegiance to the professional Institution. Responsibility for professionalism and probity lay with them as individuals – reflecting Gray and Clegg's (2003) suggestion of 'individual responsibilisation'.

3.8.2 Organizational Influence and Professional Practice

Noordegraaf (2007) researched organizational influence in health and social care describing it as tracing a transition from 'pure' to 'hybrid' professionalism. He suggested knowledge supporting 'pure' professionalism was based on the 'control of content' while present-day professionalism is about 'controlled content' by which he meant the strength of the employing organization to determine the content of professional activity and the content of the knowledge required by professionals. This he argued resulted in a fragmentation of the professional knowledge base. Monitoring of activities and behaviours have become the preserve of the organization, and may not always reflect the code of behaviour endorsed by the Professional Institute. As a consequence, Noordegraaf (2007) argues the practitioner is left feeling they have more in common with the organization which motivates an allegiance towards the organization and away from the Professional Institute. As is discussed in the chapter on data analysis, in the larger private organizations represented in this study, this was indeed the situation. A further possible consequence of unmoderated organizational influence, although not discussed by Ackroyd and Muzio (2004) or Noordegraaf (2007), may be the relative deprofessionalisation of the occupation as knowledge, skills and codes of conduct become organizationally specific and not necessarily shared by all practitioners. A contrary perspective would view this as an opportunity for enhanced professional specialisation.

3.8.3 Organizational Influence and the Professional Institute

While based only on theoretical conjecture, it is possible to envisage how the CIPD as the Professional Institute, may be forced into relinquishing the role of defining the professional knowledge base and as the professional regulator as the organization and the individual practitioner may assume this role. Profession then becomes constructed as an occupational

value, or what Freidson (2001) referred to as 'The Third Logic', where specialised workers control their own work and where professionalism was regarded as a concept too useful to both capital and the stability of the state to dismiss. In Freidson's portrayal the control of work lay within the domain of both the individual and the collective group, in this study control lay primarily with the organization as driven by business needs.

3.9   The Changing Face of the Professions

Explored by Fournier (1999) and later Evetts (2003a) the construction of professionalism as a dynamic and evolving concept is increasingly understood as representing a fundamental departure from what we have previously understood. In the past the professional worker has been characterised as having autonomy in respect of their professional judgement (Ram 1999) and in their freedom to make decisions. They have also enjoyed high social respect and a degree of immunity from external regulation or evaluation by others apart from their Professional Institute. The aim was to manage people in a working environment by inculcating an internalised self-discipline to mimic the process of professional socialisation. Professions have also been described as self-regulating occupations (Irvine 1997) in that respect professional institutions have monitored education and training requirements, accredited the institutional provision of training, awarded and renewed professional licenses, controlled aspects of professional practice and disciplined recalcitrant members.

These aspects of internal or self-regulation have been jealously guarded by professional bodies to prevent Government intervention, yet there is evidence from this research to indicate how this responsibility is increasingly undertaken by the employing organization. Evetts (2006b) is concerned with the increased use of the concept of professionalism as a mechanism of occupational change and social control in work organizations. A point alluded to in her previous examination of the changing nature of discourse of professionalism:

> ...the discourse of professionalism is in fact being constructed and used by managers, supervisors and employers of workers rather than by the practitioners themselves, and it is being utilized in order to bring about occupational change and rationalization as well as to (self-) discipline workers in the conduct of their work. It is argued that

this use of the discourse is very different from the earlier (historical) constructions and uses of 'professionalism' (Evetts 2006b:523).

3.9.1 Professions and this Research Study

As discussed in a later chapter on data analysis, the findings of this study mirrored the points raised above concerning the role of the organization and the individual. Practitioners in larger private companies were more likely to pledge their allegiance to the employing organization than their Professional Institute. They also saw 'self' as the primary arbiter and regulator their professional conduct as opposed to the Professional Institute.

Professions form a special and privileged category of occupations which some authors, most notably Crompton (1990), Greenwood and Lachman (1996) and Reid (1996) have argued are under threat from organizational, economic and political changes which are rendering the professions less dominant and less autonomous. They are also portrayed by MacDonald (2002) in her study of nurses as experiencing a decline in their ability to exercise autonomy and occupational control over their work (MacDonald 2002) and a decline in their ability to act as self-regulating occupational groups, or in the words of Tucker (2007) to exert 'worker citizenship' in contemporary occupations (Tucker 2007). Indeed, Krause (1996) was so concerned as to the future of the professions as a collective force that he warned of the end of the professions as a particular form of social institution. While this study is not quite so pessimistic in its conclusion, there was only limited evidence that practitioners in personnel and HRM identified with each other as a collective in the sense of being a special and privileged occupational category. This can, in part, be associated with the lack of a clear occupational remit as practitioners worked in specialist areas such as employment law or training which varied greatly from each other. There was therefore little by way of occupational knowledge or shared identity to unit them as 'citizens'.

This thesis suggests a new model of the professions is emerging. It is characterised by a mutually endorsing relationship between the work organization and the individual practitioner. While it is peppered with tensions and boundary disputes concerning probity and ethical

behaviour, it is largely effective because the aims of the organizations and those of the practitioner are essentially consistent. The biggest change in this emerging construction of professions is the strengthened role of the individual actor with responsibility for their own professional project and the relative decline in the role of the CIPD as arbiter of professional conduct and the provider of professional knowledge.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This review of the literature gave credibility to the argument that the professions remain a prominent feature of the public and private sectors and are likely to persist; but that they, and their individual members, are in a continual state of evolution. This is leading to what Ackroyd (1996) described as the 'new model' professions. Ackroyd (1996) maintained new professions had emerged since the start of this century without government regulation or patronage, and were associated with the development of an effective and independent form of occupational organization representing groups of professional practitioners. Their structure and status was loosely described as mirroring the constitution of the early professions but they were characterised by greater flexibility and less prescriptive regulations with the membership being influenced by the organization in which they are employed. This was important because it identified not only the changing context in which occupations operate, but more importantly the strategies professions employed to ensure their survival and continued relevance. It evidences the adaptability and evolutionary nature of the professions referred to by Ackroyd and Muzio (2004).

The review of the literature has illustrated how the foundations of cultural, social and political life have and are altering. This change, according to Hough and Briskman (2003) means that previously understood organizational and professional relationships and traditions are fragmenting. As a consequence, it is becoming necessary for many of the professions to also change in order to meet the needs of their respective stakeholders (Jones and Novak 1993:195). Evidencing this transformation Bartlett and Ghoshal (2002) observed professions are:

....left gasping for air at the breadth and rapidity of change during the past two decades. Hierarchy has to be replaced by networks, bureaucratic systems transformed into flexible processes and control based management roles must evolve into relationships featuring empowerment and coaching (Bartlett and Ghoshal 2002:34).

The suggestion from this literature review is that contemporary analysis of professions must move well beyond ideas of coherent and autonomous bodies of expert practitioners if it is to adequately describe today's realities. Central to this dimension was the analysis of the professions in conjunction with employing organizations and the organizations influence over professional performance and roles. As Holroyd (2000:39) identified: 'professionalism is not some social-scientific absolute, but a historically changing and socially constructed concept-in-use', reinforced by Quicke (2000) who advised 'the level of transformation over recent years justifies a reinterpretation of the professions' (Quicke 2000:290).

It remains fitting advice.

The following chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework that influenced the direction of this study. Themes emerging as being of particular interest concerned the role of the organization, the motivation, skills and abilities of the individual practitioner and the influence of the Professional Institute. As a consequence of their significance, the three themes provided the focus for the initial pilot study and were incorporated into the final interview schedule.

Chapter Four   Methodological Choices and Phenomenography

4.1   Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theoretical and conceptual framework determining the direction of this study. It establishes why I adopted an interpretive approach and why I chose a phenomenographic conceptual framework. It describes what phenomenography is and how it has been employed as a research tool. The chapter considers issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research and reflects on some of the limitations of phenomenography. The research approach reflects my belief that we make sense of the world and act in certain ways because of our individual experiences as we journey through life and that our responses to situations and phenomenon will vary over time. My thoughts are reflected in the now rather oft used quotation from Marton and Booth (1997):

> in order to make sense of how people *handle* problems, situations, the world; we have to understand the way in which they *experience* the problems, the situations, the world that they are handling or in relation to which they are acting. Accordingly, a capability for *acting* in a certain way reflects a capability *experiencing* something in a certain way (Marton and Booth, 1997:111).

Undertaking any research project in any discipline requires the researcher to make certain choices. My focus on 'perceptions' implies I was not seeking a 'truth' or testing out a hypothesis; rather I was seeking individual ideas, experiences and thoughts about professions and about being professional. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested qualitative research produced findings that were not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. Ueltzhoffer and Ascheberg (1999) argued the aim of qualitative research was primarily of a sociological and psychological orientation as it attempted to gain insight into the individual's subjective interpretative patterns, experiences and positions. Similarly Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggested qualitative research was most interested in processes and meanings that were not experimentally examined. A qualitative approach allows the research participants to speak for themselves according to their own interpretation of their lived reality. This research orientation is consistent with the aims of this study and with my ontological claim that there are multiple realities with each being highly subjective and

variously constructed by the individual. My epistemological assumptions about how we view knowledge; whether we think it is subjective and based on experience and insight (Cohen 2002b) or hard and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form (Burgess et al. 2006:54) also influenced my methodological choices. I believe knowledge is intangible and subjective but constructed in a framework of critical realism which recognises both the individual and the social construction of knowledge.

4.2   Considerations in Research Design

Research design, data collection tools and reporting methods reflect the assumptions of the researcher about what constitutes knowledge (epistemology) and how they understand knowledge (ontology). As Cohen et al. (2002b) suggest:

> It is not possible to select a methodology arbitrarily since each one brings with it epistemological and ontological choices. The choice of ontology informs methodology. '[Ontology]... have profound implications for research... The choice of problem, the formulation of questions... methodological concerns, the kinds of data sought and their mode of treatment - all will be influenced or determined by the [ontological] viewpoint held (Cohen et al. 2002b:9).

According to Tight (2004) the key to an effective research project, is to ensure the research process and the assertions of validity are consistent with the traditions of the methodology – with, as he so wonderfully puts it: 'no ontological gerrymandering' (Tight 2004:399). Gerrymandering is a form of political meddling. It takes its name from an exercise in 'redistricting', in which the electoral districts or constituency boundaries are covertly manipulated in order to gain an electoral advantage, as such it may be used to help or hinder a particular outcome. In the context of research Tight (2004) is effectively referring to taking shortcuts which may give the impression of enhancing the validity of the research but which are the result of an inappropriate shifting of ontological boundaries during the research process.

Epistemological assumptions have been classified into two discrete categories: positivism or an interpretive approach which is sometimes referred to as phenomenology (Bryman 1988). They are presented as representing two different perceptions of the world, which are frequently portrayed as antithetical, although this claim is challenged by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who argued the time has come to adopt a mixed methods research paradigm. Positivism, assumes the existence of an objective world that can be known through universal laws. It holds that social reality is independent of the observer and constitutes uniformities that can be observed, measured and explained. It employs deductive reasoning which operates from the general to the more specific with conclusions being based on certain assumptions. Informally referred to as a 'top-down' approach, the process moves through a process in which an existing or evolving theory informs the development of a hypothesis which is then tested or observed with the theory finally being confirmed, modified or refuted. Appropriate research tools would generally be quantitative and might include laboratory testing, scientific experiments, certain types of questionnaires and documentary analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarise positivism:

- an ontological assumption of a single, tangible reality 'out there' that can be broken apart into pieces capable of being studied independently: the whole is simply the sum of the parts

- an axiological assumption of value freedom: that the methodology guarantees the results of an inquiry are essentially free from the influence of any value system (Lincoln and Guba 1985:28).

Positivist ideas of reality sit in opposition to my own; and I would have found it difficult to undertake a piece of research in which I was being fundamentally disloyal to my own values and beliefs. In addition, in this study I was not seeking to test an idea, I was not seeking to determine if one perception held more or less validity than another. I was concerned to listen to and understand all perceptions, and through them try to understand what the concept meant to a very specific group of practitioners.

4.3   Adopting an Interpretive Approach to Research

Interpretive or phenomenological research is not concerned with testing or confirming a hypothesis but with trying to understand how people experience the world, the ways in which they interact, and the settings in which these interactions take place.   Underlying this approach is a belief that it is not possible to find an objective truth, only interpretations of various truths. The approach which is qualitative and inductive in nature, starts by observing a phenomenon of interest.   A pattern of similar behaviours, experiences or perceptions emerge from the observations and this permits the tentative development of a theory. Appropriate qualitative research tools might include observation, interview, case study, focus groups and diary analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarize this approach as follows:

- data are not detachable from theory for what counts as data are constructed in the light of some theoretical consideration and the facts have to be reconstructed in the light of interpretation

- in natural science law, like relationships asserted of experience, are internal because what we count as facts change

- meanings are determined by theory and understood by coherence rather than by correspondence with facts (Lincoln and Guba 1985:28).

4.4   Mixed Methods Research

In reality however, the difference between a positivist and interpretive methodology is not as absolute or static as may have been suggested above, many studies adopt a mixed methodology (Johnson and Onwuegbuizie 2004) and see value in a 'less purist' approach (Schofield 2002). For example, Hassard (1993) acknowledged the value of 'methodological freedom' lies in affording a deeper, richer description of the topic under investigation (Hassard 1993:110). Gibbons et al. (1994) highlighted changes in research practice and talked of growing specialisations, competing methods of inquiry within disciplines and the growth of interdisciplinarity research as being positive developments. Svensson (1997) stated 'since ontological and epistemological positions are quite general in character, the ontological and epistemological assumptions also tend to have some generality (Svensson 1997:164-5).

Brew (2001) later endorsed this adding that 'disciplines do not provide the primary way in which people think of their research' (Brew 2001:272). Nespor (2006) agreed arguing this mixed approach was a good thing:

> there is a need for a more inclusive approach', suggesting we needed to release ourselves from the confines of constructs and to 'think of research as moving stuff around, structuring regimes of visibility and organizing positions from which to speak for others (Nespor 2006:117).

My thesis is an inductive interpretive study because it seeks meaning and interpretation not facts to support or refute a hypothesis. However, because I define a clear and purposive sample stratified along the lines of qualification, experience, gender and organizational type it does reflect some quantitative aspects.

This section has described the differences between positivistic and naturalistic approaches to research indicating how they influenced the design of my study and my choice of research tools. The following section offers an overview of phenomenographic studies and justifies why I adopted phenomenography as my preferred research paradigm.

4.5 Phenomenographic Research in Educational Studies

The aim of phenomenographic research is to describe the qualitatively different ways in which individuals perceive the world around them, how they constitute the meaning of a phenomenon and how these meanings differ across individuals. Phenomenography explores the variation in perceptions of an experience or of a phenomenon (Andretta 2007:153). In phenomenography, meaning is described as a relationship formed between the individual and the world. This underpins the phenomenographic proposition, namely that ways of experiencing represent a relationship between the individual experiencing the phenomena and the phenomena being experienced. Phenomenography espouses what is called a 'non-dualistic' ontology, in other words the assumption is that there is no single world out there waiting to be understood, rather there are multiple worlds – each with its own unique way of being understood:

There is not a real world 'out there' and a subject world 'in here'. The world [as experienced] is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her [sic]; it is constituted as an internal relation between them (Marton and Booth 1997:13).

Phenomenography as a qualitative research method has its source in social philosophy and psychology. It arose in the late 19th century in response to positivism which, as a scientific approach, could not adequately address the problems being presented to the humanities (Sadala and Adorno 2002). It was initially developed by and is most often associated with Husserl (1962), who according to Bernstein (1983), believed that subjectivity underpinned all scientific understanding and that phenomenography allowed the researcher to describe phenomena as they revealed themselves, rather than explaining or reasoning their cause. A phenomenon can therefore be defined as a situation or condition experienced in daily life (Giorgi 1985) so, when using phenomenography as a research method, the researcher starts with the lived experiences of the respondents, uncovering their understandings of their experience.

In this way, phenomenography allows the researcher to see the personal meaning respondents attach to their experiences and how they create their own personal reality (Lawler 2003). As stated by Martin (1992) phenomenography is about the understanding of phenomena as opposed to the explanation of them. It sees phenomena as qualitatively different and attempts to understand how they are experienced, conceptualized, understood and ultimately perceived (Marton 1994).

Two approaches to phenomenographic research have emerged – descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenography is rooted in Husserlian philosophy which focused on describing human experience as it is, as opposed to employing predetermined theories of scientific thought (Martin 1992). In undertaking a descriptive phenomenographic methodology, the researcher attempts to put aside their preconceived ideas about the phenomenon being researched (Patton 1990; Paley 1997). Underlying this approach is the notion that the fundamental nature of a phenomenon can be seen through 'the principle of

intentionality: consciousness understood as consciousness of something' (Sadala and Adorno 2002).

Interpretive phenomenography developed from the philosophy of Heidegger (1962), a student of Husserl (1962), who contended that it's neither possible nor necessary to attempt to separate one's experience from the phenomenon being observed and interpreted. Therefore, the aim of interpretive research is to create a mutually meaningful account of the phenomenon under research, from the perspective of the respondents and the researcher (Price 2003). According to Kleiman (1995) the purpose of descriptive research is to create a structure of the phenomenon observed whilst the interpretive approach seeks to create an account, in text or story, that provides insights into the phenomenon observed.

Following the Husserlian understanding, that the essence of a phenomenon arises through the conscious awareness and intention toward it (Sadala and Adorno 2002), this research essentially adopted an interpretative phenomenographic approach. Howvere, any perceived claim to purity on my part must be treated with caution as, having undertaken the study, I am unconvinced a clear divide between the two approaches is achievable with any certainty. The two approaches tend to work in harmony and contribute to the whole rather than operate as distinct and separate approaches to phenomenography. For example, it was difficult to isolate or put 'aside my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon being researched' (Paley 1997) but I was equally aware of not imposing my views when I sought to 'create a mutually meaningful account, from both the respondents and the researcher, of the phenomenon under research' (Price 2003).

Phenomenographic research is a prominent method of research amongst educational researchers. It really started in Sweden in the mid 1970s with the work of authors such as Ference Marton, Lennert Svennson, Roger Säljö and Lars-Owe Dahlgren. Research in the 1980s (Marton and Booth 1981, 1986) concentrated on general principles of learning, and many educational studies using phenomenography have been published over the years (Dalgreen and Fallsberg 1991; Richardson 1999; Lucas 2001; Åkerlind 2003, 2005a and b,

2008; Andretta 2007; Boon et al. 2007). The results exerted a strong influence on educational theory and practice, particularly in higher education. There have also been specialised studies in education, for example Rose et al. (2005a and b) employed a phenomenographic methodology to explore lecturers' understanding of themselves as assessors, Trigwell (2006) researched attitudes to the teaching of geography, in 2006 Watland employed it to research on line tutor support and Bartlett-Bragg (2006) used it to explore adult learners' experiences of weblogs. The qualitative orientation of phenomenographic research in these studies has been used to describe the experience of teaching and/or learning (Bruce and Gerber 1995; Prosser 1993; 2000), the experience is presented as a relationship between the process of teaching and the experience of learning.

The utility of this research paradigm has also been evidenced by its stronger visibility and application across other disciplines (Bruce 2006). For example Säljö (1996) studied conceptions of culture, Hazel (1997) used the approach to explore issues of gender, Miller (2002) researched the views of children with diabetes mellitus and in the same area of practice Sjöström (2002) applied phenomenography to understanding perceptions of nursing research, while Hales (2004) extended the applicability of the approach to study individuals' meanings of environmental responsibility. As Ashworth and Lucas (2000) observed, the process of phenomenographic research has seldom been discussed and warrants greater exploration, as:'...the process by which the research is conducted is of key importance in terms of determining whether the outcomes are ontologically defensible and epistemologically valid' (Ashworth and Lucas 2000:296).

As Ashworth and Lucas (2000) correctly observed, one consequence of phenomenography's rather ad hoc development is that its methods and its philosophical grounding have been given relatively little attention by its pioneers. As Richardson (1999) noted, this has resulted in considerable ambiguity and confusion. In phenomenography 'metaphysical beliefs and ideas about the nature of reality and ... knowledge do not come first. What come first are more specific assumptions and ideas directly related to the specific character of the empirical research' (Svensson 1997:164).

Phenomenography was selected because it is not tied to any dominant paradigm and is predicated on a belief that 'reality' is a relative and internal relationship between an individual and the world. That it is subjective and influenced by time and space, and so constructed differently by different individuals. Phenomenography does not claim to study 'what is there' as an observable scientific reality, but it does claim to study 'what is there' in terms of individual conceptions of the world (Webb 1997:200).

The primary research aim of this study was to describe and understand practitioners' representations of profession and of being professional. In terms of methodology this has implications. In selecting phenomenography there was an implicit decision to adopt a distinctive second order approach to my analysis (Marton 1981). In research with a first order perspective, the researcher is interested in describing various aspects of the world, what the reality looks like and why it has these characteristics, whilst in second order research, the researcher is interested in describing people's experiences of various aspects of the world, how people experience and think about their reality. Watland states: 'rather than making statements about how a phenomenon *appears* to individuals and interpreted by the researcher, which would be a 'first order perspective'; we need to focus on how the phenomenon is *experienced* by individuals, which is a 'second order perspective'' (Watland 2006:2). And as Marton agreed, the aim of phenomenographic research is:

> ...not to classify people, nor is it to compare groups, to explain, to predict, rather it is to aggregate modes of experience and forms of thought into a limited number of categories (Marton 1981:181).

Research on professions has tended to adopt a first order perspective in that it has been interested in identifying the collective common experience and less interested in how the individual perceives those experiences. This study is therefore based on the premise that research which examines the experience of a profession and of being a professional from a second order perspective is unusual and will advance understanding as it specifically identifies the conceptions and considerations of the individual.

In summary, this study commits to the use of a phenomenographic research methodology. Justification is based on a review of previous studies in similar context where it has been used successfully. I therefore consider it appropriate for the purposes of establishing the qualitatively different ways people approach and perceive profession and of being a professional. And, as stated, because it assumes a non-dualist world; there is no differentiation between an objective 'real' world and a 'subjective' experienced world. The subject and object (phenomenon) are linked, not separate, existing together in a space both subjective and objective, this linking gives rise to what Svensson (1997:171) lists as the fundamental assumptions about phenomenographic research. Namely, that knowledge is assumed to be based on human understanding of the world instead of absolute truths because 'truth' shifts. And as people express understandings through conceptions, these become the central form of knowledge. Scientific knowledge can never be viewed as an absolute truth, because as human interactions with the world evolve and in the process new truths emerge. Understanding and knowledge can only ever be a temporal phenomenon. Integrating these fundamental principles into my approach to my research principles provided the distinctive approach to data collection and analysis that I sought in my work.

4.6   The Phenomenographic Process of Analysis

Uljens (1996:134) provided a useful outline of the process of phenomenographic research, which I observed as closely as possible. I have annotated each of the steps to indicate how they were adapted to meet the needs of this study:

1. Selection of a phenomenon in the existing world (profession and of being a professional)

2. Selection of an approach to look at the phenomenon (interpretive phenomenography)

3. Discovery (by a process of tape-recorded interviews) of the participants' ideas about the selected phenomenon (transcriptions but with the additional use of audio data)

4. Transcription of the tape-recorded interviews

5. Analysis of the written statements and description of constructed categories (to produce the principal perceptions and ultimate conclusions).

The analysis of phenomenographic research data typically starts with reading the interview transcripts (Clow 2001; Parry 2003; Bowden 2005; Watland 2006; Boon et al. 2007). Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) stated the very first step involved 'reading through the transcripts' (Sjöström and Dahlgren 2002:341), similarly for Dall'Alba (1994) the first step was always to 'read the transcripts and assign [them] to particular draft categories' (Dall'Alba 1994:79–80). For Bowden (1994b) the first task was for 'a member of the team to read all the transcripts' (Bowden 1994b:47), as I did not have the luxury of another team member I undertook all the analysis, but with support from my supervisor. Brew (2001) referred to the 'painstaking analysis of the data with each phase of the study [being] analysed separately with the transcribed responses being treated as one long script' (Brew 2001:275). In the final stages I too followed this approach and treated all transcripts as one long interview.

4.7   The Actual Process of Data Analysis

The approach to analysis I followed was similar to the six steps described and adopted by Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002), this was chosen because their approach represented one of the most logical and sequential detailed in the literature. It was also frequently used by others, for example Hirschkom and Bourgeault in 2005 and later Kuhlmann in 2006, used the same approach to analyse the perceptions of education and professional training among nurses; both studies were similar to this study in that they sought to elicit individual perceptions among professional practitioners. The same approach to data analysis was also adopted by Andretta (2007) who sought an appropriate analytical framework for the analysis of information literacy education and by Åkerlind (2008) who explored the perceptions of researchers on the subject of academic research. The approach therefore had a sound provenance.

- **Step one** is referred to as familiarization, and is where the researcher is introduced to the empirical material by reading through the transcripts and correcting any errors

- **Step two** involves the compilation of answers from all respondents to a certain question or prompts. The main task here is described as the need to identify the most significant elements in any comments offered by each respondent

- **Step three** is a condensation or reduction of the individual answers to find the central parts of more substantial comments or dialogue made by the respondents

- **Step four** involves preliminary grouping or classification of similar answers

- **Step five** is a preliminary comparison of categories, where the researcher tries to establish borders between the categories. Sometimes this step entails a revision of the preliminary groups

- **Step six** consists of naming the categories to emphasize their essence.

Phenomenographic analysis produces a descriptive model of qualitative variation in the ways a group of individuals experience a phenomenon (Marton 1981; Marton and Booth 1997), by identifying common themes. 'Ways of experiencing' are categorized into 'conceptions' that emerge from the data analysis as commonality is identified across responses. Each conception says something unique about the phenomena of study and stands in logical relationship with the other conceptions (Marton and Booth, 1997). Deriving conceptions in phenomenographic research is an iterative process relying on the reading and rereading of all responses several times. After possibly the third or fourth reading, initial conceptions are noted. At the next more thorough reading certain responses can be allocated to conceptions thereby adding validity and reliability to the concept. At any subsequent readings responses are evaluated in detail for their relative fit within each conception. This often results in reducing the number of conceptions.

The conceptions form the 'categories of description' (Bartlett-Bragg 2006:225-226), essentially these are the descriptions or labels given to the different ways individuals experience the phenomenon. They are 'logically and hierarchically related from the narrowest and most limited to the broadest and most inclusive' (Reid and Petocoz 2006:109). Marton and Booth (1997) state each category of description results from careful analysis of the interview data and that each category, like the initial conceptions continues to tell us something distinct about a particular way of experiencing the phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997:125). In essence, the process of analysis involves the organization of data into topics or phenomenon, differentiating the relevant from the non-relevant, abstracting key thoughts and

experiences, reducing them to reflect the key concepts and comparing them across the range to reveal 'similarities' and 'differences' and the ultimate categories of description (Marton 1994).

Marton and Booth (1997) suggested categories of description should meet three criteria:

- each category should describe a different component of the phenomenon

- relationships between each category should be hierarchically represented

- the outcome space (or principal perception) should be made up of the minimum number of different categories that describe variation across the sample.

Through the analysis of the transcripts the categories of description are identified. They make up the experiential field of awareness which is referred to as the 'outcome space'. The term 'outcome space' is used in most phenomenographic studies to refer to the key features, principal dimensions or experiences identified by the respondents. Another way of considering the 'outcome space' is as a way of classifying and describing the main perception or perceptions to emerge from the study. The term 'outcome space' is rather clumsy, I prefer, for no other reason than a lexiconic idiosyncracity, to refer to the outcome space as the 'principal perception'.

4.8   Defining the Principal Perceptions (or Outcome Space)

The usual method of phenomenographic analysis is to work with transcripts of interviews or other written materials, in order to establish the categories of description (Rose et al. 2004). Analysis starts with individual responses, although it is the variation in the range of experience across the whole respondent set that is ultimately sought (Bradbeer et al. 2004:19). Transcripts are read and reread while looking for categories to emerge from the whole rather than from individual responses.

Some phenomenographers see the categories and the language in which they are expressed as relatively unproblematic. Others, in particular Bowden (1994), stress the need for caution and for the researcher to be extremely sensitive to the context in which the phenomenon was experienced and urging the need for the researcher to 'bracket' their own experiences so as

not to influence the process of analysis. Bracketing (also called epoché or the phenomenological reduction) is a term derived from Edmund Husserl and refers to the researcher suspending judgment about the natural world. It is intended that it should precede phenomenographic analysis.

The concept can be most easily understood as 'unpacking' phenomena, or, in other words, systematically peeling away their symbolic meanings like layers of an onion until only the thing-in-itself remains. In other words, bracketing involves setting aside the question of the real existence of the contemplated object, as well as all other questions about its physical nature. Bracketing is therefore a fundamental aspect of Husserlian phenomenography, but followers of Heidegger's interpretivist stance adopt a slightly different approach to bracketing. Salsberry (1989) observed that all knowledge of the external and internal world is mediated by conceptual frameworks.

These concepts are operative not only in the researcher's interpretation of events but also in the participants' remembered telling of events. Thus, the vexing question of whether we can ever be free of our own conceptual understanding and particular historical point of view is doubled: Even if the researcher can bracket their own viewpoints, there is no guarantee the respondents are able to bracket theirs. And, if this is the case, does the fact that respondents do not bracket their own preconceived notions in the telling of experience mean that our knowledge is based on a flawed understanding, already skewed from the things themselves?

These questions constitute something similar to the hermeneutical circle, and this is the notion of bracketing as I wish to define it. Husserl emphasized the temporary nature of the brackets, and although I do not disagree, the focus that I would like to emphasize is one of bracketing the natural attitude and any old understandings. In other words, the project of bracketing attempts to get beyond the ordinary assumptions of understanding and stay persistently curious about new phenomena. I believe this provides opportunity for fresh experience and the possibility of new horizons of meaning.

Given that under this construction, bracketing can be seen as a hermeneutic move, it is not inconsistent to employ bracketing within an interpretive research project such as this one. In this study several steps were used to minimise researcher subjectivity, although the extent to which I succeed remains open to debate. First, data collection and preliminary analysis was conducted from the second-order perspective centring on how respondents described different aspects of their surrounding world, rather than how I as the researcher interpreted their world as in a first-order perspective (Marton 1981). I also tried to faithfully record and interpret data from the respondents' perspectives and tried not to judge data against my values or existing knowledge, although they were compared with other respondent data. Finally, I did not generate any formal codes prior to looking at the data; all were developed from the audio recordings and the transcripts using the words of the respondents.

Determining the outcome space or principal perception, calls for critical judgement to be made by the researcher. It is this point in the process of analysis that has exposed phenomenographic research to criticism (Richardson 1999) because the identification of the principal perceptions relies on the judgement of the researcher. Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003) drew attention to the fact a different researcher with a different world view may interpret the data differently and reach a different conclusion. Phenomenographers have responded to this challenge in various ways. Marton (1988) simply accepts it as a feature of discovery Bowden (1994), Walsh (1994) and Trigwell (2000) sought to diffuse reliance on the so called danger of relying on the interpretation of just one researcher by employing external reviewers to examine exemplars and outliers for each category of description and thus identify a consensus of opinion. Marton (1988) refers to this as 'intersubjective agreement'. To limit the possibility of subjective interpretation Prosser (1993; 2000) and Dahlgren and Olsson (1985) start their process of analysis by analysing only a preliminary sample of transcripts. They then analyse the remaining transcripts. While this approach helps make the data set more manageable it holds other risks. As Åkerlind and Kayrooz (2003) note, there is a risk of jumping to conclusions based on the initial analysis and then 'seeking' to find the same perceptions in the analysis of the remaining transcripts.

Respondent validation has been used (Mays and Pope 2000; Whitely 2006) as a way to enhance the validation of transcript analysis (Guba 1981; Kvale 1996; Uljens 1996). However, in interpretive phenomenographic research this is inappropriate because such studies are context and time specific, their value being in eliciting perceptions held at a particular point in time. A respondents' perception may have changed between the initial time of asking and subsequent stage of seeking respondent validation. It is therefore not advised in this type of study. Indeed Morse (1999) and Winter (2000) went further and questioned the extent to which any researcher should feel obliged to respect the perspective of the respondent. They argued it was the researcher's work and field of expertise and so questioned the extent to which the respondent would be able to or want to recognise research findings, particularly if they might be disadvantaged in some way.

Defending this stance Mays and Pope (2000) point out that most researchers seek to provide an overview, whereas respondents have individual concerns which can result in apparently discrepant accounts. In addition Barbour (2001) argues researchers may be tempted to disregard their own interpretations and to accept those of respondents at face value. While this can be cosy it may also lead to collusion and the attendant dangers of 'romanticising' respondents' accounts (Barbour 2001:1115).

In this study validation of the principal perceptions by a co-researcher was not possible as I worked alone. I did not analyse an initial sample of the transcripts as I considered this would emphasise some aspects over others which may distort the data set as a whole. I treated the transcripts as one continuous dialogue. I did not seek respondent validation for the reasons given above.

4.9   Reliability and Validity of Phenomenographic Research Studies

The issue of reliability is important in all social science research. Reliability in phenomenographic studies is not generally considered to have the same meaning as reliability in qualitative research Barlett and Bragg (2006), Shanbhag (2007), Trigwell (2006) and Bruce (2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) claim that the traditional criteria of quality in

empirical investigations should be given another meaning in studies applying qualitative analysis:

> ...we have raised doubts about the applicability of these canons of rigor as proper criteria for judging the credibility of theory based on flexible research. We have suggested that criteria of judgement be based instead on the detailed elements of the actual strategies used for collecting, coding, analysing, and presenting data when generating theory, and on the way in which people read the theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967:224).

Erlandson et al. (1993) recommend using the criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability for qualitative studies. In this study credibility was addressed by collecting data from respondents engaged in the phenomena of interest, by verification of interpretations by myself in conjunction with my supervisor and by reviewing findings of similar phenomenographic studies on professions and of being professional. Transferability was addressed by the use of thick descriptions of the context of the study and of the conceptions held by the respondents. Confirmability was strengthened by keeping a data file of responses, which included notes on differences in interpretations, and the results of discussions that led to changes in categorizing responses. Dependability was addressed by managing - to the extent this was possible - researcher subjectivity through bracketing (Sandberg 1997). Interpretation was bracketed by examining the responses for similarities and differences without judging the extent to which the responses reflected my own understandings or experiences (Marton 1994).

In addition, Cope (2004) suggested the reliability and validity of phenomenographic studies is enhanced by a precise description of each part of the research process, the perspective applied to the phenomenon, explicit presentation of interview questions and procedures as well as a careful description of the analyses and conclusions (Cope 2004:2). He suggested the following guidelines for increasing validity which I have observed in this study:

- the researcher's own background and understanding of the phenomenon in question should be identified

- the interview question design should be justified

- the steps taken to collect data should be transparent

- the data analysis methods should be outlined

- the processes for arriving at categories should be identified (Cope 2004:6).

4.10   Triangulation

Triangulation addresses the issue of internal validity by using more than one method of data collection to answer a research question, Richardson (1991) suggests that it is more helpful to conceive of complementary rather than competing perspectives and offers the term 'crystallisation' as an alternative to triangulation.   In this study triangulation or crystallisation was achieved through observations and field notes made during the interviews, the audio recordings of the interviews and the written interview transcripts. It was further supported by making reference to professional documentation, meeting minutes, reports and other resources available from the professional institute such as the CIPD web site, the annual report and operating statement and five year strategic plan.

4.11   Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been integrated through out this research study. As a consequence they have not been presented as a discrete or separate section. I have treated ethics like I have treated the actual writing. I could have chosen to write a short section on how I approached the writing of this thesis – was I going to adopt a conventional third person approach or a discursive approach or a reflexive approach. I decided that actually writing about how I was going to write about the study was unnecessary – as it would be evident to the reader how I was writing, and I have adopted a similar stance in relations to ethics. Under the surface ethical considerations have been taken at every step of the journey. For example, I underwent formal research ethics training as part of my supervisor training at my employing University.

In conducting the study I discussed ethical issues with my supervisor and reviewed them at regular intervals during the research process. In a previous section I have discussed my selected methodology – that of phenomenography. In order to be true to this conceptualisation and uphold methodological rigour I needed to adopt a second order approach to my research – one that demanded I did not try to explain the way in which the respondents perceived the phenomenon – but provided an accurate and transparent description of their individual accounts. I could not influence what they were saying or try to shape their perceptions - I had to be totally ethical and act with complete integrity at all times. If I had failed to do this in any instance – the research, its fundamental principles, its ethos and its distinction would have been compromised to such an extent that the validity and the reliability of my work would have been questioned – and rightly so.

I have taken steps to ensure that research data and its sources remained confidential and explained to the participants who would have access to it and how it would be used: Information Sheet Appendix four. In addiotn, and again to ensure ethical probity I explained and gave written confirmation of their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the investigation whenever and for whatever reason they wish. There was no coercion of research subjects to participate in the research: Information Sheet Appendix four. Consent was freely given in order to be valid and all participants gave their signed and informed consent: Consent Form Appendix Five. I did not change the research scope since gaining consent. At all times I demonstrated respect for the respondents' rights and privacy.

I have not attempted to influence the outcome of the research. I have reported faithfully all aspects of the data. I did not try to affect the respondents' perceptions in any way. I remained a neutral observer. I was consistent in the way in which I collected the data. I was conscious of 'bracketing' my beliefs as described in full in the thesis. I have not falsified or misrepresented any of the data – full field notes and transcripts are available for scrutiny, as evidenced by the interview transcripts: Appendix Eight and Nine. Finally, throughout the research study I have followed a sound, replicable and reliable research process that I have

documented in full. Each stage of the process has been discussed in full and sampled by my supervisor.

As the author and researcher I have alluded to my position but I have not articulated it in any separate section. My relationship with the material, the respondents and the data has become transparent and evident through the course of the thesis...The same with ethics – I trusted it would be evident to the reader that at all stages ethical considerations were being attended to in an appropriate manner and that explicitly writing about ethics in fact shifted that integration to one of appendage...which was not what I wanted to achieve in my work.

4.12   Limitations of the Research Paradigm

Phenomenography is an appropriate approach for an inductive study of this nature. However, it is not without limitations and not all phenomenographic studies have been exemplary. For example Marland (1989) researched distance learning and would have been more accurately described as an anthropological (Mills 2005) rather than phenomenographic study because the analysis focussed on describing 'sameness' rather than 'variation'. In phenomenographic studies the variation in the ways in which people experience is the absolute essence of the approach (Morris 2006:1). A study by Boon et al. (2007) purported to adopt a phenomenographic approach to research information literacy, but actually used processes of iterative analysis which would have been more accurately described as grounded theory. Eizenberg (1986) was concerned that the extended application of the approach and its use by 'loose researchers' may result in a lack of methodological rigour and lead to 'chats at the foot of the stairs' or an informal discussion 'over a beer' being regarded as legitimate forms of phenomenographic data collection (Eizenberg 1986:21). I was therefore conscious to avoid 'loose chats over a beer at the foot of the stairs' (....cold white wine is infinitely preferable).

4.12   Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the salient issues behind my decision to adopt an interpretive approach; and has explained how my research choices were shaped by personal ontological claims and by my epistemological position. It identified the limitations of the previous

research and the subsequent identification of a research approach that responded to the gap in the literature. The argument put forward was for the research focus to take on a second-order perspective, where the research focus is on experience as described by the research participants. It described the principles of phenomenographic research, the process through which perceptual data is analysed and how this process generates categories of description, which inform the identification of the principal perceptions (or outcome space). Finally it detailed some of the issues associated with phenomenographic research, in particular in relation to ethical considerations and explained how I overcame the challenge to demonstrate the reliability and validity of my work.

In the following chapter the analytic procedures for conducting a phenomenographic study are outlined in order to explain how I ensured methodological rigor. It details the criteria governing the selection of organizations and respondents, it describes how the first pilot study used focus groups and why I decided they were inappropriate, and finally it describes the design and implementation of the main study.

Chapter Five: The Pilot Studies, Respondent Identification and the Research Interviews

5.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter five presents an account of the research methods employed in this study. Section one provides an account of the first pilot study. It describes how my initial decision to use focus groups as my tool for data collection proved to be inappropriate for this type of inquiry. The remainder of the chapter explains the research design I adopted and the methods I employed in the main study for data collection and analysis. Method, in this context, refers to the techniques and processes used to collect and analyse the data (Crotty 1998) specifically in phenomenographic research.

5.2 The Pilot Study using a Focus Group

In undertaking effective social science the use of a pilot study is considered good practice (Sampson 2004; Brown et al. 2008). Following this advice, in December 2005 I organized and led a pilot study in order to test the use of focus groups as my chosen research instrument. My initial decision to use focus groups was based on the same approach being adopted by other phenomenographic studies, for example Franz et al. (2008), used them to understand the experiences of learning among civil engineering students. Russell (1994) described as 'Synergetic' focus groups in which participants set their own agenda to explore a particular phenomenon in sensitive, personal or controversial areas. This type of focus group was used by Wilmett and Lidstone (2004) to explore sexuality among students in Australia. I had also used focus groups in previous research with international students and found them to be an effective way in which to collect a large quantity of data in a relatively short time frame with little cost and with few resource implications.

For the pilot study focus group I used a purposive sample, that is, one in which the members were selected to be representative of the research population. In phenomenographic research it is particularly important that the respondents selected are appropriate for the purpose of the research. As deMaris (2004) suggested, a primary consideration is they have 'knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation' (deMaris 2004:59), and

as Ashworth and Lucas (2000) also advise 'the selection of participants should avoid presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon or the nature of conceptions held by particular 'types' of individual while observing common sense precautions about maintaining 'variety' of experience' (Ashworth and Lucas 2000:300).

After gaining ethical approval from my employing university I invited practitioners to form the pilot study focus group. This comprised three males and two females aged between thirty and sixty and occupying roles in training, learning and development, personnel and HRM. Two respondents were self employed HR consultants; one was from the private sector and two from the public sector. Respondents were at a senior level with between five and twenty-five years experience. All participants received a research information sheet and signed a research consent form. A briefing sheet, which consisted of prompt questions, was tabled. There was no formal interview schedule. With the permission of the participants the focus group was recorded. The focus group lasted for an hour and thirty minutes during which time a discussion was held on perceptions of PHRM as a profession and perceptions of being a professional. The discussion was tape recorded and transcribed in full.

The transcription was analysed in accordance with the process set out in chapter five. It followed a process in which I first gained familiarity with the data by reading the transcript; I then identified the most significant elements in the comments offered by the respondents. These were reduced to reveal the more substantial comments and then grouped to portray similar conceptions, which formed the 'categories of description'. Data from the focus group revealed 'similarities' and 'differences' in experiences:

- when benchmarked against the established professions P/HRM was perceived of as an aspiring profession
- P/HRM as an occupation did not 'require' entry-level education qualifications or the achievement of any formal professional qualification in order to practice, thus rendering it not a profession
- P/HRM was perceived as not being a profession because the professional institution lacked power

- P/HRM was perceived as unprofessional because as it lacked a recognised code of conduct which was consistently adopted and enforced by the Professional Institute.

However, while the focus group interview did enable me to tap into human experiences, it did not provide the insight or variation in perceptions I was seeking. I concluded it was an unsuitable method of data collection because the interaction between the members of the group produced a multiplicity of views which were difficult to attribute to any one individual. The views expressed therefore became an amalgam of shared experiences which obscured the individual variation in perceptions, which lie at the heart of phenomenographic research. I subsequently found other evidence about focus groups (Krueger 1994:11) which also suggested respondents do influence each other with their comments, and in the course of a discussion, the opinions of any individual might be so influenced by the others that their words are actually unrepresentative of how they really feel.

The limitations of the pilot focus group included:

- audio quality was poor which made transcription very difficult

- attributing comments to particular individuals was almost impossible as a consequence of poor quality recording and differentiating the voices was not easy

- multiple conversations occurred simultaneously making it hard to identify who was talking and what was being said

- the focus became bi-polar: 'was P/HRM a profession or not'. The discussion was restricted and led by one particular member, his dominance precluded participation by all the members.

Full Details of the Pilot Study can be found in Appendix One.

The Pilot Study Transcript can be found in Appendix Two.

5.3   Using Qualitative Interviews in a Phenomenographic Study

Having experienced the limitations of the focus group I explored the option of using interviews. Interviews allow the researcher to gather a large amount of qualitative information in a relatively short period of time, although usually from a relatively small sample. One of the

most useful interview formats for conducting qualitative research (Barriball and White 1994) is often semi-structured rather than a highly structured interview that consists of closed-questions, or indeed an unstructured interview, where the respondent is simply given the freedom to talk about whatever they feel is appropriate. Rubin and Rubin (1995) indicated how 'qualitative interviews allow the researcher to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you do not participate' (Rubin and Rubin 1995:1). Seidman (1998) endorsed their value adding:

> a research interview…provides access to the context of people's behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour. Interviewing allows us to put behaviour in context and provides access to understanding the action' (Seidman 1998:4).

My decision to adopt semi-structured interviews was therefore consistent with other phenomenographic studies (Bowden 1994; Walsh 1994).

My experience of the focus group was sufficient to indicate that asking open questions for example: 'is P/HRM a profession' produced a simple 'yes' or 'no' response and that questions such as 'what is a profession' or 'what are your experiences of being a professional' were too vague and insufficiently focussed. My review of the sociological literature on professions had highlighted key areas including the role played by the professional association in controlling access, maintaining standards and developing jurisdictional boundaries. The literature, in particular the work of Fournier (1999; 2000) and Evetts (1998; 2003a; 2006a; 20006b) had drawn attention to the influential role of the organization in defining the status of the professional and the occupation. The focus group had highlighted the significance of self-identify – stemming in part from the practitioners own career and background. I therefore incorporated these themes when designing the interview schedule. My objective was to provide the respondent with a series of prompts which had origin in the literature and data emerging from the focus groups, which were sufficiently structured to offer a framework for their discussion but sufficiently flexible to allow for individual experiences to unfold and were familiar and so not threatening. The carefully constructed research questions, through which I gained my interview data, therefore became one of the key tools which helped me to structure

and organize my findings and ultimately informed the conclusion to my study. In determining the interview questions I recognised that my professional proximity to the subject would provide me with insight and understanding which would inevitably influence the construction of the questionnaire, but as. Erlandson et al. (1993) reassured, it is impossible to eliminate the interaction between the inquirer and the subject, and that very often the inquirer in a naturalistic inquiry, is an integral part of the phenomenon under investigation.

5.4   The Second Pilot Study using Semi Structured Interviews

To test the appropriateness of individual semi structured interviews I undertook a further pilot study in August 2006. The pilot study respondents received an interview schedule along with a research participant information sheet and participation consent form which was signed prior to the interview. At the start of the interview I provided an overview of my purpose and intended uses for the data. I outlined the measures I would take to protect confidentiality and anonymity and gained permission to record the interview and take notes. Throughout I was aware of and noted, non-verbal communication for example, smiles; seating position; body posture and eye contact. At the conclusion I asked for comments about the prompt questions and the interview format. This resulted in several amendments. For example, the initial schedule asked: "Can you give me a brief résumé of your career history over the past ten years?" This was a non-threatening question which allowed the respondent to talk freely about something with which they were familiar and it was hoped it would help to calm and reassure them, and in this respect it was successful. However, it also generated data that was not relevant to the study and was subsequently changed to: "Can you tell me how you become part of the P/HRM function?" Being more focused elicited data that were more relevant and was incorporated into the final interview schedule. The interview addressed the limitations identified in the focus groups, and as a result of the second pilot study I was able to confirm the suitability of individual semi-structured interviews as the main research tool and proceed to identify suitable interview respondents.

The final research interview focussed on the dimensions detailed below:

Background

- Can you give me a brief résumé of how you became part of the HRM function

- Briefly describe your current organization and your role within it.

- Has your HRM role changed over the years?

- What have been the key influencing factors and/or stakeholders in the drivers for change process?

Being Professional

- How would you define a profession, can you give me some examples and tell me why you perceive them as professions?

- What is your perception of being professional?

- Who assesses your professionalism in the context of HRM?

- How far do you perceive Personnel/Human Resource Management to be a profession?

- In your perception what would need to change to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Organizational Perspective

- How far does the organization for which you work influence the status of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

- In your opinion what would need to change within the context of the organization to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

- How far does the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development influence the status of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

- In your perception what would need to change within the context of the lead body to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Other

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

A copy of the Research Interview Schedule can be found in Appendix Three

5.5 Respondent Identification

Respondents for the actual study were identified against precise criteria. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that qualitative research involves much smaller sample sizes than in quantitative research (Patton 1990), and in phenomenographic research, a sample size of between 15 and 20 is considered to be sufficiently large to reveal most of the possible viewpoints and allow a defensible interpretation' (Trigwell 2000:58) although some studies (Bowden 1994) cite smaller sample sizes of 10 to 15. In this study I had twenty respondents. Each respondent was required to be a chartered member of the CIPD which guaranteed they had at least three years work experience at management level, respondents were also selected to reflect the gender balance of the occupation with 70% female, 30% male (Tasker 2006).

Total Membership	**127,415**
Gender Split	**%**
Female	72.51%
Male	27.49%
Total	**100.00%**

Source: www.cipd.co.uk

To reflect the growing emphasis on the role of the HR consultant (external and internal) (Adams 1991; Clark 1993; Tamkin et al. 1997; Ulrich 1997; Caldwell 2001) I also wanted to include self employed practitioners, my final sample included two HRM consultants. Specific organizational representation was also sought from the public and the private sectors with both large and small organizations being represented from the private sector, nine came from the public sector, nine from the private sector and two self employed. There was no representation from the voluntary sector. Organizations were selected from across the UK. Ensuring the representation of a range of organizational types increased the generalisability of the study findings (Schofield 2002: 101).

Having identified organizations that met my sample criteria and ensured geographical spread an approach was made by telephone to the most senior member of the function to seek their agreement to participate. Two organizations (a national retailer and a major refining company) were not interested in receiving my calls, three organizations (a hospital, a university and private consulting company) promised to return my calls but failed to do so and in two further companies (a privately owned medium sized food processing plant and a multinational animal food plant) I was informed "the organization did not participate in research activities". In others, (a national retailer, a major construction company and an architects practice in London), although they were willing to participate, it was not possible to arrange a mutually convenient time. The final study sample comprised twenty organizations which included the public sector represented by local government, education, an emergency service, the ministry of defence and a hospital trust. Larger multinational companies in the private sector were represented by a major airline, two oil companies, a national retail office supplies company and a science engineering and data company. Small and medium sized companies in the private sector were represented by a hygiene work wear manufacturing company, a venture capital company and two self employed consultants

The procedure for gaining informed consent was as follows:

- Following verbal agreement by telephone to participate in the study, an email letter together with information about the study and the consent form were sent to each participant. The information detailed how the study would be used and how to exit the study at any point in the future

- Respondents had at least seven days to study the information before signing it

- The researcher gathered all the completed forms before the interview took place.

The protection of the respondents' rights was guaranteed by:

- Prior to the commencement of the study, a telephone call was held so that I could give details of the study and they had an opportunity to ask questions

- They were asked to sign the informed consent

- Confidentiality was ensured and each respondent was given a pseudonym.

A copy of Participant Information can be found in Appendix Four.

A copy of the Participant Consent Form can be found in Appendix Five.

From the original twenty respondents, a female HR Director from a chain of private hotels and a male HR Director from a private waste management company in the North were excluded from the research study. They were excluded because during the interview they informed me they were "not actually CIPD qualified". This was despite the criteria for participation being discussed in detail over the telephone when access and participation arrangements were agreed, and despite the respondents receiving the written documentation detailed above which clearly set out the eligibility criteria. I continued the interview to its natural conclusion and thanked the participants for their contribution. The matter of the interview being invalid was not discussed. Having excluded these two respondents I sought two further interviewees who reflected the same criteria (a male HR Director respondent from a medium sized private marine inspection company and a female Director from a private sales company).

The final study population comprised:

- Head of HR (1)

- HR Directors (6)

- HR Manager (2)

- Business Partner (2)

- Consultant (2)

- Academic (3)

- Diversity manager (1)

- Personnel Manager (1)

- Training Manager (1)

- Training Officer (1).

Respondent Profiles can be found in Appendix Six.

A Résumé of the Research Respondents can be found in Appendix Seven.

Eighteen of the twenty respondents described their move into PI/HRM as a conscious career decision; only two respondents entered the field by accident. Wayne, a HRM Director in the NHS 'happened upon HRM as a career choice' and Katie, a Training Manager in a Large Private MNC 'fell into' a career in HRM. Eight of the twenty respondents had pursued a previous career. These included a horse riding instructor, a mechanical engineer, and a

geoscientist while only seven joined the occupation directly from university. Of the twenty respondents fifteen had a first or higher degree when they started their careers as P/HRM practitioners, three of the five without degrees were working to complete a Masters Degree, the remaining two planned retirement. The educational profile of the study sample is consistent with CIPD (2007a) survey data which indicates that most qualified practitioners are graduates.

5.6   The Research Interviews

The interviews were undertaken between December 2006 and January 2007. It was crucial to keep the period of time over which the interviews were conducted to a minimum because in phenomenographic research, time and context are important variables. The reliability and validity of the research is enhanced if all participants are interviewed within a relatively tight time frame. Allowing the interviews to stretch across several months or years would have increased the likelihood of a change in the external context (economic, political, natural disaster, war) which may have influenced respondents perceptions and so compromised the control for 'sameness' across the sample.

All interviews were arranged at the convenience of the respondent and where possible at their choice of location. I considered this was important to maintain a balance of power in the relationship and to ensure the respondent was as comfortable as possible during the interview. As the interviews progressed I became conscious of a level of involvement with the respondent which was somehow 'pulling' me in to a relationship with the interviewee. From an epistemological position this was potentially compromising. I will explain. From a phenomenological perspective Marshall and Rossman (1995) described: '... a specific type of in-depth interviewing grounded in the theoretical tradition of phenomenology' (Marshall and Rossman 1995:82). The theoretical tradition to which they refer, and which distinguishes phenomenographic interviews from other forms of interviews, lies in the relationship between researcher, the respondent and the subject matter. Jasper (1994:311) commented: '... the researcher using a phenomenological approach needs to develop specific research skills to enable him/her to get the "lived experiences" without contaminating the data'.

This presupposes it is the researcher who 'contaminates' the data but, by implication, it also implies it is possible to 'not contaminate' the data. I was conscious that by engaging in a relationship with the respondent in which I sought to explain and involve them in the research, I might indeed be influencing the data. However, a basic requirement for phenomenological interviews is the interest the researcher has for the others' stories, so any attempt to 'absent' myself from the interaction appeared to be unrealistic, false and equally prone to 'contaminating the data'. I therefore took heart from Polit and Hungler's (1991) perspective, that the 'subjective judgement of the researcher is valuable in phenomenographic-based research' (Polit and Hungler 1991:16).
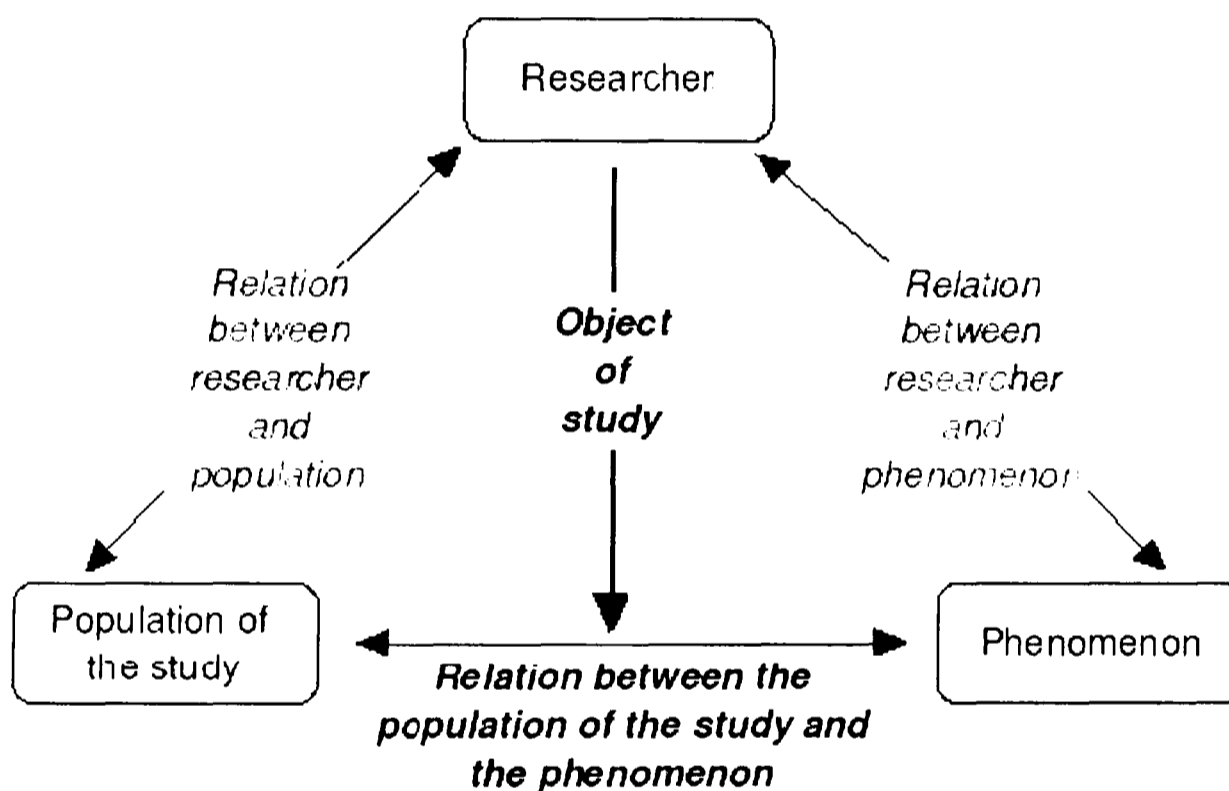
Figure One: Relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon (Polit and Hungler 1991:16).

5.7   Recording Phenomenographic Semi Structured Research Interviews

The research interviews lasted between twenty minutes and one hour twelve minutes, the average being forty-five minutes. With permission, all interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and external microphone. All interviews were coded using the unique code automatically ascribed by the digital voice recorder, comprising the number in the interview sequence and the year. All interviews were transcribed verbatim using a

professional transcription service. The most challenging aspect for the transcriber was the heavy Scottish accent of some respondents. Employing a professional saved my time, enabled the transcriptions to be completed quickly and produced high quality documents but it denied me the opportunity to 'relive' the interviews. This may have been a factor which contributed to my need to listen in depth to the audio recordings during the process of data analysis.

5.8 The Significance of Interview Location

When arranging the interviews I tried to ensure they were undertaken in a location of the respondent's choice. Seventeen were undertaken in the respondents' office and five were conducted in my office. Visiting the respondents' work organization provided additional triangulation data and enabled me to access clues concerning the culture of the organization. Being aware of and taking time to assimilate and understand the culture in which the research respondents operated, was one of the main aspects of effective research outlined by deMarris (2004) in her work on rethinking the material mind and was deeply embedded in the work on organizational culture undertaken by Schein (1985) who presented a three-tier hierarchical model of organizational culture arranged in order of visibility: cultural artefacts, espoused beliefs and assumptions. By visiting the organization I was be able to observe these aspects, and this helped me to understand the perceptual position of the respondent. To illustrate, Fiona, was the HR Director for an emergency rescue service. Her role was becoming increasingly prominent and strategic. Her office was tiny and not at all impressive. As we entered she smiled and explained that for her it was more important to focus on getting HRM right for the organization and promoting its value. She was not in the least bit concerned about the size or location of her office. This insight helped me understand her motivation to the organization and her attitude to her work.

Throughout all the interviews I was also aware of managing a 'power agenda' that shifted with each respondent and within the process of each interview. In many respects I held the balance of power; I had determined the interview schedule, the length, the focus, the order and the dimensions to be covered. However, I had tried to rebalance the relationship by

trying to undertake the interviews in the office of the respondents rather than in my office – unless they requested to come to me, and by starting the interview with a very open and general question about the respondents' own career history. However, my aim to reassure did not always work and the respondents' nervousness resulted in non stop talking. Perhaps the most unexpected was an interviewee who appeared nervous and rather subservient to the process. The interview was held in his office, so he was in familiar surroundings and it was conducted in an open and friendly manner. However, the respondent's nervousness was evident by his fidgeting, playing with a pen and a calculator, and his stumbled sentences which were frequently incomplete or poorly constructed, almost short monologues. To illustrate, in one interview following the opening question his answer resulted in a transcription covering two sides of A4 in font size ten, his second answer produced one and a half sheets of transcript.

Research interview literature highlights that respondents frequently seek to 'please' the researcher with answers that are believed to be 'what the study requires' (Price 2001:275) and in the process become 'anxious'. However much I tried to reassure the respondents that I held no preset ideas about what data should emerge they seemed to want to please. However, it was not a situation I felt could be discussed during the interview. The irony is that this respondent was one of the two who were excluded from the final sample as he was not CIPD qualified.

Examples of Interview Transcripts can be found in Appendix Eight and Nine.

5.9   Chapter Summary

This chapter has given a synopsis which endorses the methodological decisions I have made. It has illustrated how my initial decision to use focus groups was inappropriate because one or two dominant personalities determined the direction of the groups' conversation. They were also inappropriate because while they did generate sufficient relevant data. However, the focus group was nonetheless a significant step in informing my decision to adopt semi-structured interviews. The chapter also detailed the process of respondent selection and

explained why two members of the initial respondent sample were subsequently excluded from the study.

Chapter six focuses on the process of applying phenomenographic analysis to the data gathered in the research study. In particular it explains why I made the research decision to deviate from the accepted approach to analysing phenomenographic data and evidences how the use of the actual audio recordings of the interviews revealed an additional layer of data which enabled a deeper level of understanding of the respondents' perceptions of profession and of being a professional.

Chapter Six   My Decision to Listen to Audio Recordings of the Interviews

6.1   Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the stages I followed in the process of analyzing phenomenographic data. By describing each stage in detail it creates a clear audit trail that could be followed by another researcher thereby contributing to the transparency of the analysis and so to the credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability of the study. The chapter explains why I made the decision to deviate from the 'accepted' approach to phenomenographic analysis and start the process by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. In most phenomenographic studies analysis starts with consideration of the written interview transcripts and does not make reference to, or specifically analyse the spoken word.

6.2   My Decision to Listen to Audio Recordings of the Interviews

As stated in chapter five, in most phenomenographic studies the process of data analysis starts by reading and rereading the interview transcripts. The analysis of phenomenographic research data typically starts with reading the interview transcripts (Clow 2001; Adawi 2002; Parry 2003; Bowden 2005; Watland 2006; Boon et al. 2007). For Dall'Alba (1994) the first step was always to 'read the transcripts and assign [them] to particular draft categories' (Dall'Alba 1994:79–80) for Bowden (1994b), the first task was for 'a member of the team to read all the transcripts' (Bowden 1994b:47) I did not have the luxury of another team member so analysis was undertaken primarily by me with the support of my supervisor. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) suggest transcripts are valuable because they 'facilitate audits of analytical decision points because they preserve the data in a more permanent, retrievable, examinable and flexible manner' (Lapadat and Lindsay 1999:80); Tye and Ross (2001) adopt an approach in which they 'subject each narrative script to an initial detailed content analysis' (Tye and Ross 2001:9). Brew (2001) referred to the 'painstaking analysis of the data with each phase of the study [being] analysed separately with the transcribed responses being treated as one long script' (Brew 2001:275). Sjöström and Dahlgren (2002) suggested 'the start of the analysis phase is a matter of reading and rereading the whole interviews before ending up with certain sections or excerpts that convey the most significant information' (Sjöström and

Dahlgren 2002:341) while Åkerlind (2002) indicated 'the process of analysis starts with a search for meaning or variation in meaning across interview transcripts, and is then supplemented by a search for structural relationships between meanings' (Åkerlind 2005:324).

Therefore, with the notable exception of Svensson and Theman (1983), Kvale (1996) and Ashworth and Lucas (2000), it is fair to suggest in the vast majority of phenomenographic studies, the process of data analysis starts with the written transcripts. Very few phenomenographic studies make any reference to the value of the spoken word as recorded in the interview.

In my desire to be a 'perfect researcher' and do everything as I should by following 'best practice' examples, I too tried to start the process of data analysis by reading the transcripts. However, it soon became apparent that what Green, Franquiz and Dixon (1997) referred to as the 'reality of the transcript' was somehow missing from the written transcripts. The dialogue established in an interview represents a constant flow of changing opinions along with the occurrence of new facts and new considerations leading to the development of new and alternative conceptions, I felt some of this insight was missing from the transcripts. To illustrate, having conducted each of the twenty two interviews I could remember certain moments within each of the interviews. I had retained a picture in my mind of the physical features and dress of the respondents and of the environment in which the interviews took place. I had also retained a 'sense' of the interview, whether the respondent was relaxed or anxious and whether they appeared enthusiastic or cautious about the interview. In addition I had a strong image of the way in which the respondent spoke during the interview. I could recall quite vividly and with clarity the tone of their voices, the moments of humour, loaded irony, heavy sarcasm and hesitation. I could recall certain respondents saying sentences with such conviction, assurance and passion that it effectively changed the entire meaning of the actual words. This changed meaning was not always apparent in the transcript and I felt by focussing only on the written word in the transcript the significance of this additional level of meaning was being marginalised if not lost completely. I therefore made an independent, but

informed decision to 'adapt' the usual approach to analysis and, instead of commencing by reading the transcripts; I started my process of analysis by listening to the audio recordings.

The first stage in the audio analysis involved listening to all the interview recordings. I did not have any preset codes in mind, make any notes or search for any specific themes; I simply listened to what was being said and in particular to how it was being said.

The second time I listened to the recordings I found I was sensitive to the respondents tone of voice, the pitch, tempo and rhythm of their words. I became transported back to the interview and the emotional state of the respondent. I relived their enthusiasm and energy and equally their negativity and despondency. I became increasingly attuned to their nuanced inflections, to any emphasis being placed on certain words and to the pauses and silences in the interviews –all of which were missing in the interview transcription.

To illustrate the value of the audio recordings I will provide examples from the interviews. The first questions I asked related to: 'How do you define a profession?' 'Can you give me some examples and can you tell me why you perceive those occupation to be a profession?'. Without exception all respondents gave a clear and succinct list of occupations they regarded as professions. Invariably the list included: doctors, lawyers, dentists and accountants. However, having listed the occupations they regarded as a profession, many respondents hesitated, paused or reflected for some time before continuing. There was a degree of uncertainty in the voice, indeed some respondents repeated the question out loud several times over as they tried to articulate their reasons as to why medicine or law were professions. Rosie, an HR Director with a MNC struggled with the idea of it being something very personal, as a set of personal qualities or a social image – about being seen to be a professional. In the sentence written out below her uncertainty is made apparent by her question 'or is it', but what is not apparent is the extent of her uncertainty or the length of time it took her to resolve her internal dilemma.

Being professional is a set of personal attributes or, is it being professional or being 'seen' as professional? I can't see any point in being professional if others don't see you as professional or maybe it's more about how people perceive you?

After nearly three minutes of talking Rosie still seemed unsure about what a profession was. I am fortunate in that I conducted the interview, and so recall additional data which I can add to the picture. I can for example remember the expression on Rosie's face as she literally struggled to answer the question with any degree of confidence. I recall the look of anguish which - if I could paraphrase, said: 'My goodness, I am an HR Director – I should be able to answer this simple question– and yet I can't!!'.

There was a similar example from Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group. When he said the words 'but that's different isn't it', his voice was almost pleading and had a childlike tone. I recall this being combined with a deliberate focus on my face and a searching appeal in his eyes; he was asking me a question rather than stating a point of fact. Nigel seemed to be seeking my reassurance that he had given the 'correct' answer, and that I too thought being professional, in the context of P/HRM, was somehow different to being a professional doctor or dentist – even if he was unsure how it was different....

How I define a profession, for me there are different types of profession. You've, obviously, got your doctors, your lawyers, your dentists, they, to me, they stick out as being, what I believe, are professions, professional people. But then you could say, well, you've got a professional footballer but that's different isn't it, they don't have a professional qualification as such... (Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group).

Reading the extract it is easy to read it as though Nigel was making a statement – a point of fact, when in reality his tone of voice expressed uncertainty and caution. Another example was how the words on paper simply did not convey the actual meaning when spoken in the interview, for example the following two sentences can be read as simple statement of fact:

'This is only my perception'.

And:

> 'I'm not really sure how I feel about this one, you know, in the sense that, I wonder if we've become a wee bit of an exclusive club and I don't mean that in a, I don't really know how I feel'.

In fact when spoken, both were an apology for not offering a full answer to the research question about professionalism. In the written transcript this was not evident.

By placing a particular emphasis on just a single word Katie, a Training Manager with a private organization, changed the entire meaning of her sentence, but this was not at all apparent from the written sentence. When discussing whether or not PI/HRM was a profession Katie said with complete conviction: 'we are a profession', and yet her emphasis on the word 'are' was loaded with ironic laughter and questioning. In the written sentence Katie's response seems to confirm that indeed 'we are a profession', but in the audio recording Katie is almost suggesting that if 'we are a profession' – then heaven help us!

The frustration, anger and complete disillusionment expressed in Gill's voice was quite unsettling to hear and yet the written word conveys few of the same sentiments. Gill was discussing how she felt the CIPD were compromising the standards of membership by conferring Chartered status to candidates who were unsuitable or did not appear to meet the criteria for Chartered membership. Gill spoke in a calm voice with an even tempo, until her last three words when all she said was: 'I don't know who polices that.....'. In reality Gill does know who 'polices' it - it is in part my responsibility, but leaving that aside her words were loaded with resentment and anger as she evidently considered nobody was 'policing that' part of the CIPD membership structure.

The audio recordings also presented the reality of the spoken word – which was omitted entirely from the transcripts. The transcripts did not capture the tone of voice or verbal reflective pauses such as: 'err', 'umm', or the continued repetition of particular phrases, such as 'you know what I mean' or tonal emphasis on words such as 'Oh Yes!!' in a very sarcastic comment.

In the following example concerning responsibility for professionalism the words of the respondents were spoken with an element of surprise in their voices, almost as though it was the first time they had considered the issue. The extent to which Judith an HR Manager, Robin, an HR Consultant and Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD, were surprised and seemingly unprepared for the question, combined with the length of time it took for them to answer it, were not evidenced in the transcripts:

> Who is responsible for my professionalism? I don't know, myself I guess...I haven't given it a great deal of thought, to be honest. I think without it, it will always be sub professional (Judith, an HR Manager).

The degree of surprise in their voice was a little unsettling, and Judith was not alone in her reaction. Robin, an HR Consultant took a long, long time to think about the question. He eventually responded in a very hesitant and deliberately cautious voice suggesting he considered his professionalism to be the preserve of himself and his immediate clients but he recognised the existence of several possible tensions between the individual and the organization which he was uncertain how to reconcile. The written extract appears as a short statement about possible conflict, in the reality of the spoken word it was an extremely protected, highly reflective and uncertain discourse:

> So it's interesting then because you'll end up with two, not necessarily opposing, well potentially opposing forces, certainly parallel forces, one is your own professional self-regulation, which you've talked about in a lot of detail, and the others are the organizational influences on what you can and cannot do and what jurisdiction you have, irrespective of what you know professionally or from your own body of knowledge or your own professional code of conduct you should be doing. So how do people reconcile potentially that tension? (Robin, an HR Consultant).

An example from my interview with Karen a Business Partner with the MOD, who, again after prolonged reflection and uncertainty said – 'my peers...I think' was typical of the response I received. For at least half the respondents, consideration of 'who' was responsible for their professionalism was not something they had previously thought about indicating perhaps, that

that the respondents' sense of responsibility was so internalised they had not needed to question it. Indeed, in the final analysis detailed in chapter eight, the individual practitioner or 'self 'as the mediator of professionalism did emerge as a strong perception.

A final example is from Karen, an HR Business Partner with the MOD. Her sheer determination to continue to fight what she believed was a 'battle' to secure wider recognition for HRM as a discrete profession was not discernable from the written word, but in the audio recording her determination, combined with a total conviction that success had to be realised, was manifest. The difference between the passivity of written word and the vehemence that characterised her spoken words was considerable, and shifted my understanding of how Karen perceived professionalism from one of despair and endeavour, to one in which the word 'constantly' inferred success and an ongoing commitment to the cause:

> I just don't think that it's well established out of the HR world as a profession. I think that you constantly have to, as a support function, you constantly have to argue that you are a profession and that there's a need for an expert practitioner in HR within most organizations (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

6.3   Summary of Listening to the Audio Recordings

The examples provide an insight into what became a vital step in the process of analysis. It evidences the value of engaging with audio data before moving to an analysis of transcripts. The audio data provided an insight into the relationship between the respondent, the researcher and the interview process and revealed a high level of perceptual uncertainty, in particular perceptions about whether it was a profession. In addition, hesitancy in answering some questions suggested that for many practitioners, questions about professionalism and being a professional were issues not previously considered. The audio analysis also provided a valuable insight into the emotional reactions and feelings about their own identity as a professional and about the CIPD. The silences and extended pauses for reflection as respondents tried to formulate answers and think through the questions contributed further to the overall richness of the study and highlighted how this unusual connection with the data increased the validity and reliability of the research by giving a context to the comments.

6.4 Interview Transcript Analysis

Having gained an additional level of understanding via an analysis of the audio recordings, I returned to the accepted format of phenomenographic transcript analysis. The first step in the process was to gain familiarity. To become familiar with the written material I printed off each transcript leaving sufficient space in the margins to make annotated comments and quick observations. The decision to print onto paper rather than read on screen was deliberate, as I believe it is possible to have a 'relationship' of sorts with a document printed on paper in a way it is not possible with words on the screen. With printed work a sense of familiarity and distinctiveness develops as you learn to judge how far through the pages of the transcript the really significant comment or observation was made: was it at the start, after a few pages or towards the end. As a phenomenographic researcher, for whom familiarization with the data is crucial, I came to accept and delight in my love affair with the transcribed word.

The focus in phenomenographic research is on the collective rather than the individual experience because the research aims to explore the range of meanings within the sample group, and not the range of meanings for each individual within the sample. Rose (2005) recommends that all interviews are interpreted as one long prolog – or as one continuous interview, as theoretically, no single interview transcript should be understood or analysed in isolation. Every perception must be interpreted in the context of the research sample as a whole. In this way variation in perceptions (similarities and differences) across the entire range can be determined. The reality however, of managing twenty individual interviews as one long interview or one holistic data set was challenging and in some respects counter productive because the elements of the variation I sought could so easily be overshadowed For example, I was interested to discover if there was a relationship between the respondents' perceptions of profession and of being a professional and the size of the organization for which they worked and the level at which they operated. By treating all the interviews as one continuous dialogue, this level of detail would have been obscured. I resolved the matter by retaining the details of each individual respondent within the transcript but then saving them and printing them off as one continuous document. In this way I was

able to uphold methodological rigor and still access the data I required to help make sense of the perceptions revealed in the study.

On second reading, significant perceptions and experiences were highlighted, underlined or commented on in the margin. While not a 'code' in any formal sense, it served to draw attention to particular sentences or themes being developed by the respondents and these were helpful in the subsequent steps of analysis. The themes included; whether a career in P/HRM was deliberate, the length of time respondents had worked in P/HRM, particular words used to define a profession, perceptions of the professional institute, themes connected to the work organization, the respondents' role, its level and their job title.

Themes also emerged around the responsibility for professionalism and the role of the individual practitioner. At this stage no attempt was made to order my observations, I was conscious of bracketing assumptions remaining free from any preconceptions. In other words I was not looking for anything in particular. I did though, recognise that it was not always possible to be completely neutral, because that which I deemed to be worthy of note was, in and of itself, a reflection of my values and beliefs. However, as Winter et al. (2000) reassure, practice-based doctorates are context bound in which the subjectivity of the producer cannot be eliminated, and as Burgess et al. (2006) offer helpfully: 'research questions arise out of practice, and findings or new knowledge and understandings gained in the course of the research should inform practice, these are therefore relevant not only to the researcher but to others in a similar professional field' (Burgess et al. 2006:107).

Step two was a process of compilation. The main task was to identify similarity and variation in the comments offered by each respondent. To navigate the data in a meaningful way in step two of the analysis I made a précis of the main points to emerge from each interview and wrote them in a second thirty four page document which I was able to use as a reference guide.

The third step in the process of analysis involved the reduction of the data to identify the central perceptions and substantial comments made by the respondents. Bowden and Walsh

(1994); Bowden (2005), suggested using various foci including similarities, looking for mismatches and for changes in the respondents' experiences. The stage of reduction revealed perceptions similar to those revealed in the initial pilot study; namely that perceptions of a 'profession' were closely aligned with traditional occupations – doctors, dentists, accountants and lawyers. That being professional was perceived as a set of personal attributes formed over time, that 'self' and the work organization were perceived as arbiters of professionalism, and that perceptions of the Professional Institute were at best mixed. The reduced data formed the basis of each category of description and represented one 'conception', or one way of experiencing a profession or being a professional. In each category, referential components, that is, the critical differences in meaning, as well as structural components were highlighted. In the structural component of each category, the awareness structure was delimited in terms of internal and external horizons. The internal horizon represented the focus of the respondents' attention, or that which was figural in awareness and simultaneously attended to. The external horizon represented that which receded to the background, essentially the perceptual boundary associated with respondents' individual way of seeing something. To illustrate, the internal horizon might be the respondents' own level of professional qualification, the external horizon would be the overall structure of the CIPD system of professional qualifications. An internal horizon might be the respondents' perception of their own status and hierarchical position within their work organization, while the external horizon would be their perception of the status or position of other practitioners in other organizations.

Step four was concerned with a preliminary comparison which sought to reduce the perceptions into coherent themes. The themes, or 'categories of description', as they are sometimes referred to, needed to retain and reflect what the respondents were saying while also rendering the essence of their perceptions accessible in a way that could be applied to and answer the research questions. The identification of each category of description was based on the frequency with which a particular conception was mentioned, its centrality to the respondents experience and the number of respondents who shared a similar experience.

Following several iterations it resulted in the identification of four themes which were regarded as crucial to perceptions of profession and of being a professional:

- Perceptions that certain traditional professions can still be explained by reference to established sociological theories such as trait theory or theories of the professions as a professional project

- Perceptions of role and the function of PI/HRM as divided with personnel being an administrative and transactional function while HRM is perceived as a strategic function with enhanced status

- Perceptions of the individual practitioner as increasingly responsible for the management and mediation of their own professionalism

- Perceptions that credibility and recognition are inextricably linked to the individual practitioners ability to promote themselves and thereby influence key organizational and business decisions

- Perceptions that practitioners are becoming increasingly tied to the work organization

- Perceptions that the skills and knowledge required to be an effective HRM practitioner are progressively more business related and defined by the work organization

- Perceptions of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development as relatively weak and confused in its membership structure, direction and focus.

Step five of the analysis identifies what I have chosen to call the 'principal perceptions', although in phenomenographic research the term 'outcome space' is often used to refer to the final step in the process of analysis. However, as I have alluded to already, I found this term rather sterile and cumbersome. To refer to 'an outcome space' implies there is only one space available for occupation, while there are likely to be numerous possible outcomes. I therefore preferred the term 'principal perceptions', which I considered more accurately reflected the multivariate nature of the inquiry and the possibility of multiple perceptions. Studies have employed different approaches to structuring the final perceptions.

Edwards (2006a) in his phenomenographic study on information literacy suggested principal perceptions could be identified in a number of ways: as complex or simple; by positioning the categories as a reflection of history; as levels of understanding; or as reflecting the broader space of variation or indeed some combination of the above. This study adapted Edwards (2006a) approach of using complex or simple categories to help establish distinct borders between the emerging themes (as in steps three and four) and then naming them (as in step six) to emphasise their essential essence or ultimate meaning. Lucas (1998) warned of the danger of moving too quickly through an analysis of the data in an attempt to structure it and identify the principal perceptions, he also warned of 'making assumptions' about what was being presented in the data, another reason I tried to bracket my assumptions.

To avoid 'rushing' through the data, this stage actually took several months to complete and involved revisiting the material on numerous occasions to ensure I had become aware of and understood the respondents' comments correctly. While I think I have been thorough in my analysis and loyal to the data, I am sure that if I were to revisit the study again in two years time – I would uncover still further perceptions. However, when reviewed holistically three principal perceptions of profession and of being a professional emerged from the data:

- That it centred on the individual practitioner
- That it was influenced by the work organization
- That the role of the CIPD was located on the margins and was highly ambiguous.

Each perception reflected the relationship between the respondents' perceptions and the phenomenon of profession and of being a professional in the context of PI/HRM.

The final step in the process of analysis was naming the principal perceptions, but in many respects the strength of the data made this a self-evident exercise: The three principal perceptions are named as: the individual, the work organization and the CIPD. The emerging categories of description with the referential, internal and external horizons and the principal perception for each of the interview questions are presented in the tables to follow.

Full details of the Phenomenographic Categories of Description Arising from Data Analysis can be found in Appendix Ten.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has detailed why and how I deviated from standard phenomenographic protocol and used the audio recordings of the interviews to provide an additional layer of understanding and analysis of the data. In doing so I believe this work has made a contribution to the way in which phenomenographic data analysis can be understood and employed in future studies. It detailed the six steps I followed in analysing the interview transcripts and explained how the process revealed that respondents' perceptions of profession and of being a professional comprised discrete but interconnected categories of description.

The following chapter presents the findings that emerged from the process of analysis, in particular reference to the innate and intrinsic tensions between the three principal outcomes and discusses the implications for professional practice.

Chapter Seven: Analysis of the Interview Data

7.1   Chapter Overview

The structure of this chapter reflects the findings that emerged as a result of the actual research questions used during the interviews. It will present respondents perceptions of profession, of being a professional along with perceptions of P/HRM, the organization, the self and of the CIPD. These perceptions were deemed significant because of the number of times they were mentioned, the conviction with which they were spoken of and the extent to which they were identified as shaping respondents overall perceptions of profession and of being a professional. The chapter highlights some of the underlying tensions between the notion of 'profession' and of 'being a professional'.

7.2   Perceptions of Profession

The first perception I sought to elicit was that of profession. The interview question prompted respondents to explain how they perceived a profession, if they could provide examples of what they considered to be a profession.

The data are presented in the ables on the following pages:

Table One: Respondents Examples of a Profession and Perceptions of being a Professional

Name	Title	Example of a Profession	Perceptions of profession
1. Eric	Training Officer	Solicitor Doctor Dentist	Having an effect on people's lives A Career with a Development Structure
2. Ray	Consultant	Doctor Engineer Accountant	Specialist Knowledge A Licence to practice Membership of a Professional Body
3. Gill	HR Manager	Lawyer Doctor Dentist	Having and abiding by a Code of Conduct Qualified in a Specialist Area Engaging in Continuing Professional Development
4. Judith	HR Manager	Lawyer Doctor Surveyor Teacher	Certified to Practice A Body of Knowledge A Test you must pass Membership of a Council
5. Wayne	HR Director	Accountant Lawyer Doctor	An application of Principles and Practice Expert Knowledge A Specialist
6. Sally	Personnel Manager	Accountant Lawyer Doctor Footballer	Professional Standards Membership of a Professional Body Qualifications Engaging in Continuing Professional Development Showing Competence
7. Katie	Training Manager	Accountant	Profession = A Career Specialist Skill Set Being Effective and Competent
8. Karen	Business Partner	Accountant	Work in Own Role Code of Conduct Competent
9. Jackie	HRM Lecturer	Doctor Lawyer	Theoretical Underpinning Independent Assessment against Standards Rigorous Learning and Development Application of Knowledge
10. Mary	HRM Lecturer	Lawyer Doctor	Professional Standards Code of Practice

11. Nigel	HR Director	Accountant Lawyer Doctor Footballer	Letters after your Name Engaging in Continuing Professional Development Membership of a Professional Body
12. Linda	HRM Lecturer	Lawyer Doctor Teacher	Standing in the Community Academic Qualification Registered with a Professional Association
13. Chris	Diversity Manager	Doctor Lawyer Accountant Surveyor	Having a Licence to Practice Engaging in Continuing Professional Development Membership of a Professional Body
14. Jane	HR Director	Doctor Lawyer Accountant	Having a Qualification Having a Special Skill Having Specialist Knowledge
15. David	Business Partner	Doctor Lawyer	Recognised Standards Standardised Education Routes into Practice Public Perception
16. Martin	Head of HR	Doctor	Learning Studying Training
17. Rosie	HR Director	Doctor	Having a Defined Skills Set
18. Jane	HR Director	Doctor Solicitor	Having an area of Expertise Ethics Standards
19. Amanda*	HR Manager	Excluded	
20. Ian*	HR Manager	Excluded	
21. Robin	Consultant	Doctor	Involves Extended Study, a Degree plus a Post Graduate Qualification Controlled Entry to the Profession Assessment Control of Discipline and ability to Strike Off
22. Fiona	HR Director	Teaching Medicine Dentistry HRM	Skill and Knowledge Academic Qualification Membership of a Professional Body Licence to Practice

* Informed during the interview they were not CIPD qualified

Perceptions of profession were disarmingly similar, with only engineer, surveyor and teacher and footballer varying the list of accountant, doctor, lawyer and dentist. The respondents gave clear and unambiguous statements about which occupations they regarded as professions, namely: accountants, lawyers, doctors and dentists. However, in giving reasons for their selection, some were less certain. As mentioned earlier, the audio analysis illustrated the extent to which Rosie and Nigel, both HR Directors, struggled to explain their thinking about 'why' they cited those particular occupations as professions.

Eighteen respondents reflected the criteria used in the literature to describe the 'traditional professions' (Abbott 1988; Witz 1992; Freidson 2001; Squires 2001; Hodson and Sullivan 2002). Hodson and Sullivan (2002) described a profession as 'a knowledge-based occupation with high status that has four principal characteristics: specialized knowledge, autonomy, authority over other subordinate occupational groups, and a degree of altruism' (Hodson and Sullivan 2002:282). Each of the examples given by the respondents mirrored these four attributes. In addition, they also reflected the additional characteristic traits of a profession described in the literature, including restricted entry – often based on the attainment of educational qualification, the acquisition of a discrete body of knowledge, undergoing an extended period of training and assessment, and mandatory continuing professional development. Membership of a professional institute and regulation via a professional code of ethics and conduct, were also cited by the majority of respondents as hallmarks of a profession. In summarising perceptions of a profession, respondents held remarkably similar views, if not a stereotypical image, of both what constituted a profession and why they regarded the occupations as a profession. Their views were consistent with the accounts of the traditional professions provided in the literature.

7.3   Perceptions of Being a Professional

The second element of the interview question sought to elicit perceptions of 'being a professional'. In asking this question I was trying to uncover how the respondents applied the criteria of profession they had just given me, to themselves. I wanted to understand what being a professional meant to them. Was it about having a degree and a professional

qualification – reflecting the criteria they cited – or was it about something more than that. Analysis of the data suggests that perceptions of being a professional extended beyond the tangible characteristics of, for example, knowledge and membership of a Professional Institution, to focus on individual attributes and behaviours. The perceptual data are presented in the table below.

Table Two: Respondents Examples of a Profession and Perceptions of being a Professional

Name	Title	Perceptions of Being a Professional
1. Eric	Training Officer	Being Effective at what you do Personal Attributes: Being Timely and Knowledgeable Considerate and Polite
2. Ray	Consultant	Being seen as a professional Measured internally – by yourself
3. Gill	HR Manager	Engaging in Continuing Professional Development
4. Judith	HR Manager	Implies having Integrity and a Moral Code of Conduct Individually Orientated
5. Wayne	HRM Director	Responsibility of Explaining things to others About Self Regulation
6. Sally	Personnel Manager	Self Imposed Self Regulated
7. Katie	Training Manager	Being Effective and Competent About Personal Attitude Knowledge Having Influence Over Others Personal Credibility
8. Karen	Business Partner	Behaving Ethically Behaving with Integrity Being seen as Professional
9. Jackie	HRM Lecturer	Behaving with Integrity Behaving with Honesty Having Moral Courage
10. Mary	HRM Lecturer	About being Ethical Having a Conscience Self Regulating
11. Nigel	HR Director	Confident in own Abilities Inspiring Trust Showing Loyalty

		Demonstrating Respect
12. Linda	HRM Lecturer	Personal Being part of Something Having a Standing in the Community
13. Chris	Diversity Manager	Engaging in Continuing Professional Development
14. Jane	HR Director	Self regulation in terms of your own standards of behaviour It's how its perceived Externally that Matters
15. David	Business Partner	A Public Perception of being a Professional It's about Credibility, Integrity and about how I portray myself
16. Martin	Head of HR	About Knowing My Boundaries It's About Knowing how to Behave About Being Conscientious
17. Rosie	HR Director	It's About Credibility
18. Janice	Business Partner	It's all About Personal Qualities It's about Ethics and Standards About Integrity About Adding value
19. Amanda*	HR Manager	Excluded
20. Ian*	HR Manager	Excluded
21. Robin	HR Consultant	That I am Perceived and Treated as a Professional
22. Fiona	HR Director	About Credibility My Perception of being Professional is Strong Other People's Perceptions Maintaining a Professional Attitude

* Informed during the interview they were not CIPD qualified

Perceptions of being a professional placed considerable emphasis on individually situated and personally mediated attributes, which went way beyond the possession of certificated knowledge, accredited skills or membership of a professional institution. Perceptions were deeply rooted in the respondents own behaviour. Personal ethics and individual integrity were regarded as the foundation stones of being a professional. The data reveals a perception of being a professional that goes beyond the tangible and jurisdictional boundaries of the occupation, beyond the remit of the employing organization and beyond the immediate concern of the professional institution. It was perceived to be primarily about 'self', about taking responsibility for ones own action, maintaining ones own professional integrity and reconciling ones own professional dilemmas.

The significance of having to reconcile professional dilemmas and to navigate ones way through myriad demands and competing agendas emerged as one of the most significant findings of the work. It through into sharp relief any notion of harmony or naturally occurring synergy between the notion of 'profession' and of 'being a professional' The notion of profession was by and large accepted as being reputational sound, concerned with achieving best practice and, outwardly at least, - as being collectively and socially orientated. Actually 'being a professional' however was differently constructed and was imbued with misgivings of forced allegiances, misplaced loyalties and unfulfilled promises and commitments – in particular in relation to the CIPD. Respondents spoke of being 'let down' by the CIPD or, in the words of Mary, a HRM Lecturer, that the CIPD had 'somehow lost its way' and become 'schizophrenic' to the point where we had become the 'authors of our own mess'. Similar tensions over due allegiance was expressed by Robin an HR Consultant of many years standing, who referred to the need to discharge your professional responsibilities in a manner that as an individual you considered to be appropriate – while recognising this may not always accord with the demands being made of you by the sponsoring organization. His comments, described in full later, embodied what for many of the respondents was a manifest tension between the notion of 'profession' 'and 'of being a professional'.

The sociological literature of the professions presented the professions as a 'collective system' or a 'collective' endeavour which is exclusive, powerful, concerned with self preservation and with ensuring the collective betterment of all its members (Carr-Saunders 1933; Freidson 1983). The data in this study revealed a markedly different construction of being a professional. One that was based on an 'individual' interpretation rather than on a collective interpretation. Such extreme deviation from the literature was not anticipated.

To explain the finding it is necessary to revisit our understanding of a profession. A profession has been defined as a knowledge-based occupation with high status that has certain principal characteristics cited as (Hodson and Sullivan 2002:282) specialized knowledge, autonomy and authority over other subordinate occupational groups, and a degree of altruism. Every occupation has a body of knowledge, but it is the esoteric

knowledge monopolized by professionals that gives a profession this particular 'hallmark'. There are three dimensions to the knowledge base of a profession: theoretical knowledge, occupation-related information and processes. In the context of P/HRM, professionals may have a theoretical knowledge in, for example, industrial psychology, and sociology or employment law. The second dimension is the specific occupation related information linked to the key P/HRM functions including, for example, human resource planning, recruitment and selection, appraisal, rewards management or training and development. The third is the knowledge base, which is the process or, more put simply, the 'how' practitioners accomplish what they do. It is the manner in which they execute their responsibilities.

My analysis suggests that becoming a professional therefore occurs on two levels. First it takes place on a structural level that is the acquisition of specific professional knowledge. Such knowledge is explicit, communicable and since it has 'foundational status', it forms the content of formal learning programmes that lead to certification and professional accreditation. It can also be formally stated in abstract terms and abstraction distinguishes the professions from other groups (Abbott 1988). Second it occurs on an attitudinal level, which is in the subjective self-conceptualization associated with the role and can be explained as representing the progression from novice to expert. Such progression requires the development of situational knowledge or professional 'know how'. The study data represented it as something more than the occupational knowledge required by the Professional Institution, as Judith, an HR Manger described:

> .... professionalism implies integrity within our own moral code but I think a lot of that comes from the individual, to a certain extent, because the CIPD's idea of being a professional is, I think; just about knowledge, they think its just knowledge based.....but its not, its actually much more than that.

The 'know how' was gained over a period of time and can perhaps be most appropriately symbolized as a 'cognitive apprenticeship' which is achieved primarily through informal learning often from peers as Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD, illustrated:

In terms of my perception of being professional, I think that it is working in your own particular role, at a particular level and working to something of a code of conduct and that's about working ethically, with integrity. A part about being professional as well, to me, is about being established and being seen to be professional as well. So it's about having peers that encourage each other to operate at certain levels and learning from peers as well (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

Respondents regarded professionalism as something that went beyond the ability to demonstrate basic occupational knowledge to encompass an attitudinal element that was concerned with ethics, personal integrity, an internal moral code and being seen to be professional. These 'know how' skills were learnt from each other and equally, respondents saw they had a role to support the development of the skills in others, as Judith suggested:

I think my perception of being professional is setting a good example, supporting what the CIPD stand for, maybe to put across to youngsters the importance of things like confidentiality, integrity, reliability, good work ethic, you're not a gossip, you know, because you're in HR (Judith, an HR Manager).

For Judith the differentiating factor in being a professional was not knowledge about 'what' to do but about 'how' to enact that knowledge and to be a role model for the younger practitioners. There are clear links here with the findings from the CIPD survey (2007) which concluded that a key role for HRM was to demonstrate concern for organizational governance and to protect organizational values. While it was clear from this study that Judith did not see her role as exclusively concerned with inculcation of appropriate behaviour, she did regard it as a key aspect of being a professional. Reliance on self and self regulation can be explained as a learned process which involved the development of an individual and higher level of situated cognition or 'personal knowledge'. It had its foundations in the occupational knowledge but was more extensive and tacit. It demanded a level of self and organizational awareness, political understanding and invoked the ability to be critically aware and self reflective and as depicted by Janice, an HR Business Partner Private MNC:

What is my perception of being professional? Well I think it's the two aspects again. It's having the knowledge skills, the qualifications to be able to do the job but it's also how you conduct yourself within that role (Janice, an HR Business Partner in a Private MNC).

The message here is on establishing the framework governing the 'individual' as an interpretation of being a professional and the distinctive contribution made by P/HRM to business successes can be seen in a number of different ways. For Janice, in whose organization people are directly a source of competitive advantage the focus was on her ability to effect high quality internal working relationships and to champion HRM as a strategic partner and change agent. In 1998, Abbott argued that the command of a profession 'lies in control of the abstractions that generate the practical techniques' and '.... only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems...' (1988:9) perhaps this is what Jane, an HR Director, was also referring to when she explained:

Being a professional is not saying or doing things because others expect it. It's more a personal commitment and contract to the knowledge you have and how you personally want to deliver it (Jane, an HR Director).

This sense of self-conceptualization was embodied in the respondents' view of being a professional and can be seen as necessary for both practical and ethical reasons, in that having a strong professional identity enabled the respondents to behave with an authority, confidence, and professional demeanour that convinced others of their competence and so provided them with a framework for practice that went beyond their occupational knowledge base. As illustrated by David, a Business Partner:

I think, again, to me profession it's, in one respect is about the educational side but it's more than that. It is about, and this is where it probably does get very difficult to judge, but it is things like credibility and integrity and it's basically, how I manage and portray myself everyday. And I've always worked on the basis, even when I go back to my early career, I mean if you're in a management position, every minute of the

day you're a role model, either good or bad. So I like to think I put across a fairly positive image (David, a Business Partner).

An alternative explanation of why the individual practitioner perceived being a professional as a personally mediated activity lies in the heterogeneous nature of the occupation which therefore precludes the development of a strong collective identity. Practitioners in P/HRM hold different job titles; operate at different hierarchical levels and work in a vastly differing range of organizations from small private companies through to international conglomerates. There is no homogeneous or prescribed professional socialisation or recognised probationary period within organizations – unlike, for example the probationary period for teachers or careers advisers. Within the respective organizations the specific demands made upon each individual practitioner are incredibly diverse, often being highly specific to the particular needs of the business and not comparable across the occupational membership. The body of professional knowledge reflects this diversity with some practitioners, for example, being experts in compensation and benefits, others in resource planning and still others in employment law. There is therefore, little by way of knowledge, socialisation or work content to unite the membership of the occupation. Equally, with no requirement for a licence to practice, or any mandatory requirement to engage with continuing professional development (CPD) or to participate within the Professional Institution, there is little to unite the membership in any formal sense with the Professional Institution. In such an environment it is perhaps easy to understand why practitioners perceive being a professional is all about 'self' and about relying on internalised codes of professionalism.

7.4   Critical Perceptions of Self

The significance of self was considered by Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2003; 2006b) as a disciplinary mechanism and as a system or normative values as discussed in the literature review in chapter three. Fournier (1999) argued that what was emerging was the clear use of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism 'whereby the mobilisation of the discursive resources of professionalism potentially allows for control at a distance through the construction of 'appropriate' work, identities and constructs' (1999:281). It involved more than

just a process of re-labelling, it also involved the inculcation of how to behave via professional training combined with the surveillance and monitoring of behaviour by others. In other words, by promoting the freedom to self-govern, the organizations and the Professional Institute manipulated a situation in which the individual practitioner had no choice but to monitor their own behaviour – and so by implication – the behaviour of others. Analysis then becomes concerned with the process of normalization – of using professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism through which 'appropriate' work identities, appropriate codes of conduct and professional practices within organizations are determined internally by the practitioners themselves. Her work found resonance with Kochan (2004), Hughes (2006) and Yapa (2007) who argue professions have been forced to adapt to a new environment and new conditions for their legitimacy. Decentralisation, deregulation, privatisation and changes in the market forms have sparked a concern among sociologists (Evetts 1998; 2006b; Fournier 1999; 2000, Svensson 2006) that many professional functions have been unwittingly transformed into adjuncts of the employing organizations. Founded on a neo-Hobbesian view of power, (Clegg 1989) and construed as being possessed by a sovereign authority or agent such as the state, government or management, this new environment has been presented as subterranean and subversive. Enshrined in this view is the 'performance ethos' referred to by Fitzgerald (1994; 2000; 2004) who argued it has been used as a means first, to subordinate professional work to the control of managers (Jacobs and Manz 2000) and second to transfer power to managers who are empowered (Braverman 1974) and so undermine the autonomy and therefore status of the profession and the individual professional.

This approach essentially emasculates the professionals, presenting them as weak and easily controlled. In addition, this conflict view of professionalism, which stresses the notion of power and control as being held by one agent at the expense of the other, assumes from the outset that consensus and a mutually rewarding use of power is not an option. The suggestion from this study is this view constitutes a conceptually limiting and negative analysis of how power affects the professions and how it limits the essential freedom and ability of the professions to reinterpret and renegotiate what being professional means in the Twenty First Century. The conclusion I draw from this study is a process of reconstructing

professional identity and reinterpreting notions of professionalism is indeed occurring – but in a way that supports the aims of the organization and the individual professional. Reflecting the perceptions of those working in larger, private MNCs, respondents perceived an uncontested degree of autonomy which enabled them to drive the HRM agenda. The respondents did not discuss the perception of 'controlled autonomy' or suggest any falsehood in the degree of freedom they had to control their own actions and behaviours and influence those of the organization.

One explanation for this variation – may be because the process of cultural inculcation was so effective as to have achieved its objective of creating a false sense of freedom. However, the extent to which they recognised an essentially mutually cohesive and symbiotic relationship between themselves as individuals and the work organization implied they held a realistic and pragmatic perception of the situation. While they did not perceive an antagonistic or deterministic relationship, they did recognise the occasional pressure to conform and endorse the stated organizational aims and objectives. In this context they spoke of experiencing an occasional professional tension between their own innate code of conduct and the actions they were being asked to undertake by their employing organization. To resolve the dilemma most respondents spoke of doing what they felt to be right. On occasion this was to endorse the organization; on others it was to follow their personal sense of integrity and adopt a different approach. It was, however, perceived as a mutually beneficial relationship, as Karen illustrated:

> So in terms of that influencing me as a business partner, in terms of it being a profession, I, as I said, it harps back to my peers, the HR Director and Head of HR Ops. I was working at a level as business partner with peers who were at a similar level, though had very different experiences. And we'd all come through various different routes but we supported each other on issues if we hadn't come across them before, there would be someone there within the team that probably had – we all influenced each other in a very positive way (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

In this study the scenario outlined by Fournier (1999) was perceived in a very different manner. Colleague engagement in monitoring professional conduct was regarded as a sign of mutual respect and support, and not as a battle ground for professional supremacy. It was regarded as sharing good practice and as adding to ones own professional competence. It was seen as a positive and supportive interaction, as Karen also said:

> My professionalism is about having peers that encourage each other to operate at certain levels and learning from peers as well. I've been fortunate in this organization, working with three or four other business partners, who encouraged each other, to raise each others game. I suppose, more than anything else it's about supporting each other (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

Her perceptions were similar to those of Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service who confirmed her professionalism was monitored and supported by a number of people, but in a positive and mutually beneficial way:

> My professionalism is monitored by a number of people, the team that work for me, for Directors and the Chief Officer, my regional colleagues whom I link in with quite a lot, my local government colleagues; I network with them all so there's a whole range of people that would monitor my professionalism (Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service).

In her interview, this sentence was said with incredible fondness and admiration, her voice was positive and welcoming of her involvement with her peers and their role in her professionalism. It is possibly a reflection on the very 'people person' nature of the occupation, but without exception respondents did recognise the role of peers in managing their professionalism but did not endorse the findings of Fournier (1999) who represented it as an act of surveillance and control. In contrast they saw it as an incredibly positive force for good and representative of yet another stage in their own professional journey. I have no clear explanation to account for the difference in findings between those of Fournier (1999) and this study. Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that I engaged with relatively senior practitioners so any sense of peer rivalry or competition may have been reduced, perhaps it was because my sample set were all practitioners operating in a very 'people' orientated way

that Fournier's (1999) and Evetts (2006b) interest in trust and the control and subjugation of the professional to the manipulative demands of a controlling organization, were not endorsed by the data from this study.

For practitioners in this study the role of self and the process of self regulation were fundamental to their perceptions of being a professional. The process of self regulation was associated with their access to individual and esoteric knowledge which provided the impetus and rationale for self regulation. It can be seen as making a positive contribution to their professional status, whilst also enabling them to 'capture' regulation to suit their own ends, thereby contributing the process of the professional project of the 'self'. I suggest the future direction and status of P/HRM as a profession lies in the hands of the individual practitioners. It will be their ability to hold onto personal codes of conduct, operate with integrity and actively promote themselves as professionals to relevant stakeholders that will enhance the professional credibility and standing of the occupation.

But the future is not theirs alone. I will now suggest that practitioners cannot escape the relational and interdependent aspects of their work. They are members of an occupation which has a divided image: that of personnel and HRM and which operates in organizations which define both their work roles and the status of the function and that, amidst what Shotter (1995) called a 'chaotic welter of impressions', it's all in the name. Therefore in the next section I analyse the extent to which respondents considered the occupation of P/HRM to be a profession and will illustrate how perceptual distinction between 'Personnel' and 'HRM' was one of the most important findings to emerge from this study because while HRM was deemed to be representative of a profession, personnel was not.

7.5   Perceptions of Personnel and HRM

For reasons of methodological rigor and to avoid bias, the interview question did not make the distinction between 'Personnel' and 'HRM', it simply asked about the extent to which respondents perceived PI/HRM to be a profession. In brief, the responses ranged from an

unambiguous 'no' through to an unequivocal 'yes' with varying shades in-between, as the following verbatim quotations demonstrate:

A Definite 'No':

- Not a profession until we are commercially astute and being understanding of [sic] what the business can do to be more efficient, looking at economies of scale, so it needs to be more creative and understand external clients and the whole business more. (Jane, HR Director in a Scottish based MNC)

- We're almost embarrassed to be associated with some HR people because of their level of ability and understanding about the profession (Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service).

To several slightly less certain responses of 'Not sure':

- In a loose sense, it definitely is probably (Ray, an HR Consultant)

- Well it sort of is... (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD)

- I still think it does depend on the company, so not really (Katie, a Training Manager)

- I think it is a profession (Linda, a HRM Lecturer).

To a response that indicated HRM was a profession but personnel management was not:

- I do believe, I believe HRM is a profession, at the level I'm doing it, I would say. I'm not sure as a personnel administrator, whether that is classed as a profession (Gill, an HR Manager)

- I think you definitely see it as a profession because I think the way it's changed from personnel (Martin, an HR Director).

To responses that were hopeful – suggesting it was an 'Aspiring Profession' or a 'Quasi Profession' or one that is 'Getting there – but just not there yet....':

- It's becoming more and more of a profession every year that passes' (Judith, an HR Manager)

- It's a Quasi Profession (Mary, an HRM Lecturer)

- I think you could probably say it's an aspiring profession (Chris, an Equality and Diversity Manager)

- It's sort of becoming a fully fledged profession (Robin, an HR Consultant).

To a response that indicated the 'Occupation wasn't a profession – but the individual practitioner might be':

- I don't think a function is itself a profession, it's the person performing the function either is or is not a professional (Wayne, an HRM Director in an NHS Trust).

To 'Yes – but with reservations':

- Yes, I perceive it to be a profession, though not necessarily always delivered in a professional manner (Jackie, an HRM Lecturer)

- I don't think everyone would consider it to be a profession and I think my perception of it is probably by the fact that I'm in it and I treat it as a profession (Jane, HR Director in a Scottish based MNC).

To a definite 'Yes':

- Yes it's a profession because of requirement for wide knowledge base (Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group)

- I would regard as HR is a profession, there is a distinct skill set (Rosie, an HR Director).

A summary of Respondent Perceptions of Personnel/HRM as a Profession are provided in Appendix Eleven.

My analysis of the data indicates that the extent to which the occupation was perceived to be a profession varied. Out of the six respondents whose job title was 'HR Director', three did not consider it to be a profession; two described it as a profession and one described it as 'sort of a profession'. Both the Business Partners also described it as a 'sort of a profession'. Of the two respondents whose job title was 'HR Manager' both said they were 'not sure', as were the Training Manager, the Training Officer and the personnel manager. The greatest variation was among the HRM Lecturers, one of whom was 'not sure'; one thought it was 'sort of', while the third was definite that it was a profession. The pattern of 'not sure and 'sort of' was repeated among the remaining respondents, with those occupying roles at a lower level more inclined to regard it as not a profession or be uncertain of its professional standing.

Although interestingly, both consultants were either 'not sure' or thought it was 'sort of' a profession. The reasons for being uncertain or not sure were inextricably linked to their perceptions of the image of personnel and HRM. Overall, perceptions were mixed, but from the stories and anecdotes behind this range of responses, it became clear that the extent to which practitioners perceived the occupation to be a profession was an important determinant in shaping their general perceptions. In other words it was their own life experiences of the phenomenon that informed and shaped all subsequent perceptions of the same phenomenon.

The key to understanding their perceptions lay in the theoretical and operational distinction between personnel and HRM. As was noted in chapter two, the term 'personnel management' has been used to conceptualize a particular approach to managing the employment relationship and has frequently been employed as a deliberate contrast to 'Human Resource Management'. One finding of this study already discussed, is that progress towards professionalism is occurring at the level of the individual practitioner; they are engaging in a process of self regulation which is serving to enhance their individual credibility and standing as a professional. However this has to be contrasted with the professional standing of the occupation as a whole, in particular when the function is constructed as personnel management rather than HRM.

As I illustrated in chapter two, over the last two decades the HRM model, both among its advocates and its detractors, came to represent one of the most contentious signifiers in the managerial discourse (Storey1992; 1993; 1998). Hoque and Noon (2001) provided evidence to suggest that HRM practitioners were attempting to raise their collective standing by effecting a change in title, a qualification restructuring and enhanced CIPD membership requirements. Hoque and Noon (2001) noted too that in contrast to personnel managers, HR Managers were more qualified and were more likely to be involved in strategic planning activities and were perceived by others in the field as generally 'more credible professionals' (Hoque and Noon 2001:18). The importance of the divide between personnel and HRM was a powerful determinant in shaping perceptions; the distinction pivoted on the title and whether

strategic planning was a key function, as illustrated by Eric, a Training Officer with a City Council:

> My definition currently is based on the organization that I'm working for, and personnel is largely described as an operational function that deals with the needs and demands of staff and mangers on a daily basis whereas HR, tends to be more strategic, more policy deriving, more interpretive of legislation etc (Eric, a Training Officer with a City Council).

The divide between personnel and HRM activities was one of the most important factors that shaped the respondent's perceptions of profession and of themselves as a professional. The titles and roles they assumed had a hierarchy, with personnel manager being regarded as having least status rising through HR Manager, HR Director and ultimately to HR Business Partner. As Gill commented, the title was important, even if the actual role content was left to her to decide:

> So he gave me the title of HR Manager to give me a bit of credibility and communicated it to the workforce, what he was doing and why he was going out and what I'd be doing and then pretty much left it to me to decide how I was going to structure it and how I was going to work it. (Gill, an HR Manager in a private company).

Again, the significance to the overall professional image that a change in the title held was clearly illustrated by Robin:

> '.....people talk about it becoming more of an influence in determining how they are as an operator. And then the other key thing is a differentiator in some people's eyes, is the role of HR, again it's within the context of the organization. If HR is seen to be championed by a strategic business partner, the whole feeling of HR as a profession has more weight than if it's personnel. So there's a sort of distinction that people aren't articulating in the language of personnel versus HR but there's certainly rhetoric around the strategic involvement of HR in the business giving credibility to the function as a profession, not just as a business partner (Robin, an HR Consultant).

The respondents with a senior and strategic position had a more confident view of their role, the contribution they could make to the business and of their own image as a professional. They were generally positive about their own skills base, their ability to make a difference and the status of HR as a profession. They suggested that although HRM professionals still have some way to go to match the professional status of, for example, their finance colleagues, they have endeavoured to enhance their status by renaming the personnel function the 'HRM Department'. They believed this change of name had contributed to engendering a more positive perception of their worth and their professional credibility.

The change in title from 'Personnel' to 'HRM' and an associated restructuring of the function represented a key milestone for Sally. Although as she described not all the changes were immediately successful 'because the company lost sight of the basic functions of personnel in its move towards HRM', Sally was convinced that the anticipated elevation in her status started with a change of title:

> I think changing the title from personnel to HRM changed the function to be seen as more part of the business at the top level of the organization....I mean it has supported some change, I think, at a higher level, some necessary restructuring and it has supported at that level (Sally, a Personnel Manager).

Martin, a Head of HR, outlined a similar transition when he observed:

> It's changed from personnel and, you know, I've only been exposed to it within the last five years. I know historically, it's always been personnel and HRM is quite a new sort of title for it but I think it is what people want and obviously it has to be seen as a profession (Martin, an HR Director).

The title was an important issue for Martin, because of what it signalled to the organization about his role and about the status of the function. The previous post holder had been called HR Manager, and Martin wanted to be seen to represent a very different approach. As he quite clearly stated at the point of his recruitment:

So for the last year or so they'd had an HR Manager here and I said straight off, I said, well, I'm not coming in as an HR Manager and it's not about my ego but it's, I mean you can call me what you want but A: there's an issue regarding the package and B: there's an issue what the job content is and ultimately that's why I work. He (the CEO) said, look, we'll make you, if you're happy with that title; Head of HR. I said, again, I don't have any big issues with the title, I said but one of the things I spoke about earlier is perception and if I come in as HR Manager, I could eventually change that perception but they'll just see me as continuation of the last person. And it was funny because I've only been here just over two months and the first sort of three/four or five weeks, people still were referring to me as HR Manager and I was politely correcting them (Martin, an HR Director).

Martin's focus on the importance of his title was illustrative of concerns about the way in which the function was viewed in the organization and he was keen to ensure it was perceived as an integral part of the organizational structure, as reflected in his comment:

The influence factor, I think HR was seen more as part of the business than a support, don't get me wrong we are a support function but, suddenly the people didn't just belong to HR, you know, they belonged to the business and the opportunities in there (Martin, an HR Director).

The main consequence of a change in title for Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD, was the change it brought about in her working relationships, and key among them was the opportunity it created for her to build up her own credibility and reputational capital as a professional:

I think it is (change in relationships) one of the key changes throughout HR at the moment. And it's about HR having to adapt, I guess, to the world in which we operate and the fact that businesses are having to adapt to the world in which they operate and, obviously, the influences that has on HR. So in terms of that influencing me as a business partner, in terms of it being a profession, ...we were able to build our own credibility and reputation far earlier on, which I think was pretty key actually (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

Karen's focus was primarily on the impact the changes had on her own role, but Robin, a self employed HR consultant, perceived the general change in title and working relationships had a dual impact: on raising the professional credibility of the individual practitioner and. on raising the professional credibility of the function as a whole:

> The whole feeling of HR as a profession has more weight than if it's Personnel. So there's a sort of distinction that people aren't articulating in the language of personnel versus HR but there's certainly a rhetoric around the strategic involvement of HR in the business giving credibility to the function as a profession, not just as a business partner (Robin, an HR Consultant).

It is clear from the data that respondents felt a change in name had an impact on the professional image of the function. Clearly it would be dangerous to suggest that simply re-designating 'Personnel Departments' as 'HRM' would confer undisputed professionalism. It is unlikely this would be the case as HRM adopts a markedly different philosophy to personnel and involves a different set of business parameters. However, the change in title and the increased focus on managing relationships identified in this study accords with Armstrong's (1986) argument that the managerial professions gain authority not so much through appeals to independent professional standards and collegiate controls, but by demonstrating to senior managers how their expertise can resolve key business problems.

7.6   Perceptions of the Work Organization and Influence

For many respondents then, the attractions of identifying and being accepted by others as a practitioner with an ability to influence key business decisions related to the potential to reinterpret HRM work as a more valued and strategic activity than hitherto had been the case. This parallels Watson's (2002) observation of an individual discourse of 'professionalism' or 'being professional', which highlights issues of competence, objectivity and experience-based expertise. The ability to influence key business decisions was therefore another strong perception and drew attention to the role practitioners played in the wider business environment. Implicit within depictions of models of HRM (Adams 1991; Caldwell 2001; 2003a; Hunter et al. 2006; Kenton and Moody 2003; Kenton and Yarnall 2005; Robinson and

Robinson 2005) is an emphasis upon practitioners' skills in advising senior managers and facilitating major organizational change that involved consideration of the key strategic issues facing the business. The perception among almost half the practitioners in my research sample stressed how the legitimacy of their role was based on their ability and willingness to promote themselves as effective equals and to actively seek to influence business decisions. This reflected findings from a CIPD (2007a) survey of 787 HRM professionals in which over half of their respondents' organizations had restructured in the last year and 'by far the most common reason for restructuring was to enable the HRM function to become a more strategic contributor' (2007a). This strategic aspiration is seen as not only placing the P/HRM function in a more central position within organizations but also increasing the status of the practitioners as professionals. As Karen explained, her ability to effect change in the MOD was attributable to her strategic position, her influencing skills and her ability as a negotiator:

> You need to shape it so that you service the majority but work very closely with, influence and negotiate with the key management team, at whatever level they're operating at, be it middle through to Director or senior through to Director. Well it's partly about structure, structure I think is quite important to allow you to do that, first of all. And I don't want to down play the administrative part of it because that's vital (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

Also illustrative of this group of ten respondents was Gill who spoke with considerable pride as she described the extent to which her role had changed to reach the point where she said with confidence:

> I developed quite an influence with the management team because I worked very closely with them, because I worked for the chairman and very closely with the management team, I was promoted to manager onto the management team, the wider management team and given the title of corporate support manager, which was really, I think the managers listened to me. If they were doing something on the personnel side, anything to do with people issues, they'd come to me for my advice and I'd tell them what I thought they should do If he doesn't like it he can tell me he

doesn't like it and that's fine. So I think everyone talks to me because they know I can influence and make things happen (Gill, an HR Manager with a private company). Rosie, the HR Director for a large private multinational, was slightly more political in her appraisal of her influence describing it as a battle, between herself representing HRM, and the opposition, in the form of the line:

it's the balance of power and accountability between the line versus the functions. It's an enduring battle within X but we should win' (Rosie, an HR Director).

The concept draws attention to how practitioners sought to raise the organizational value of their professional work and assert occupational control. Under these conditions, and by way of analysis, it could be argued that professional groups, such as HRM practitioners, can be regarded as acting as 'entrepreneurs', by helping to promote and legitimate new ideas about their field of management that are also 'functional' to improving their situation. In other words, those practitioners who were able to promote and legitimate their own ideas about the value of HRM as distinct from Personnel, have been able to exercise a level of influence which has secured them improved recognition, enhanced status and the more professional title of HRM. The practitioners were able to adapt and influence their environment to further their own professional advantage, as Karen testifies:

...it's about HR having to adapt, I guess, to the world in which we operate and the fact that businesses are having to adapt to the world in which they operate and, obviously, the influences that has on HR. So in terms of that influencing me as a business partner, in terms of it being a profession, I, as I said, it harps back to me and my peers (Karen, a Business partner with the MOD).

A second, rather longer quotation from Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group, underlines his perception that it is the practitioners' responsibility to promote and secure their own professional destiny within the organization:

I think that is for the practitioners to influence. I have worked and gone into organizations where the HR have said, oh the management don't listen, they just want you to do whatever it is. I've gone in and either left very quickly because I

couldn't make any impression and I agreed with them or I've changed minds. And I think it's very much the responsibility of the individual to decide whether they want to be an activist or a pacifist. I think there's a role for both; it's a question of perhaps being cute enough to pick your finest. I think organizations look for one thing but if they see something that is more attractive, they will go for it. So, I think, possibly HR ought to start thinking about PR a little more and marketing, selling. After all, if you're in a negotiation, representing your organization with the union one side and the organization the other, you are marketing the companies, as indeed the unions are. So I think the organizations, if we want to make an impact, yes the organization has a role, it can influence you and it will influence you but if you passively accept that as the only influence and don't do anything yourself, I would say that that is where the break in professionalism comes (Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group).

The above quotations endorse the perception that having influence in the organization and promoting the role of HRM was an important lever in raising the profile of the occupation as a profession. The responsibility for being proactive and having influence clearly rested with the individual but, in Rosie's view, HRM was not always good at taking the opportunities presented to it. Reticence lost the day and Rosie lost patience with HRM:

It's moving out of a reactive, to a proactive mode because at the moment they're very reactive, which is, you know, sort this out, sort that out. They don't have much space and they don't step into the space that they're given to come up with solutions. And some of it's because they, the HR staff are generally a couple of organizational levels below or in the hierarchy, below the rest of the team. So they get treated as the 'wee lassy' (Rosie, an HR Director).

The pathway to enhanced professionalism lay in extending the field of influence within the organization. Respondents recognised the need to develop skills which enabled them to align themselves more closely with the business and, in the words of Janice, an HR Business Partner, 'playing in areas that HR's never really normally played in'. I was interested to understand what those skills were and how they were developed. I revisited the profiles of

the respondents and found that at least half the respondents in this study had come from other disciplinary backgrounds including engineering, science, military and retail operations management.

Indeed, the senior individuals stressed the value of practical and career experience outside of traditional HRM work. Hence, Nigel the HR Director for a private venture capital group highlighted how he had come to HRM work after 15 years working in mechanical engineering and winning the Queens Award to Industry before making a conscious decision to change career. Importantly, he argued his years in engineering made him a more effective HR manager through his understanding of the business activities of the firm and his ability to speak the language of line management. Similarly, Jackie, a lecturer in HRM outlined how she had moved into HRM work after twenty years in the military. At a lower level, Eric, an internal Training officer in a City Council, emphasized the advantages of time spent outside of the HRM function as an operational manager, which gave him a keener appreciation of business issues in general. This emphasis on broader business logic in addition to HRM specific skills represented an intricately woven but significant perception of profession and of being professional. It signaled a transition from a profession being characterized just by the acquisition of a discrete body of occupationally necessary knowledge, to a perception of profession being about an awareness of business in general and the acquisition of a new skills set which went beyond the interpersonal and communication skills traditionally associated with the occupation.

Respondents' comments suggested that, although they were qualified, the increasingly complex environment required them to possess skills which went beyond common sense and went beyond qualification as Judith, an HR Manger explained:

> As the complexity increases, I think the perception of the importance of what we're saying grows. The items that you listed I think affect how employees in an academic environment feel and I think it encourages them to feel stressed, to feel under pressure, to expect their employer to protect them, for their employer to develop them, for them to be properly equipped to do the job. So there's the development part and

the protection from harm part and as the environment becomes more complex, yes I think indirectly it means that the job that we're doing, in order to fulfill the need of the organization, grows in complexity. And I think that had a direct link with our perception, the perception that they have of us is being professional and the need for us to be professional and not just a common sense approach. I think if you can answer a question out of sheer common sense, why do you have to have a qualification to do it (Judith, an HR Manger).

Rosie's frustration that HR do not always take advantage of opportunities presented to them, Judith's comment professionalism was now something that went beyond qualification and common sense and Janice's desire to play in 'new areas' were typical of the sentiment that HR had to:

> concentrate more on working with the business, adding value, looking at helping to support the managers in the line, looking at more at efficiencies in the business, more leadership development, more business partnering as opposed to an HR Manager dealing with generalist activities (Rosie, an HR Director).

What follows is a longer extract from Janice, who was possibly the most proactive and confident HR Business partner I interviewed. Her words really do capture the urgency with which she spoke of the need for HRM Practitioners to occupy the space of general business rather than remain on the fringes:

> I need to be in this space now. So from my point of view, it's almost like, yes, you've got to be technically competent in HR but that's almost just a, yes, of course you will be. So you've got to know your legislation, you've got to know exactly your HR processes. It's almost kind of putting that to the side and actually saying, right, what have I got to learn now? It's all about being commercially astute and being, understanding what the business can do to be more efficient, looking at economies of scale within the business. So it's actually just being a bit more creative with the role but yes, something happens and you need to go into your technical area. So it is moving the role into an area where, it's not that I don't think we can do it, it's just

we've never had to be there before because it's never really been asked. Understanding our external clients a bit more, understanding the whole business more. As a company we're very much into the whole management team understanding the business as a whole anyway but this HR futures program pushes HR that bit further as in, you know, like I look at my counterpart in Health and Safety and yes, he's a health and safety expert and he doesn't touch anything hardly near what I have to touch now at understanding the business as a whole. He should as well but really he's not being asked that but I am, you know, it's you must know, you must be able to relate everything back to the business (Janice, an HR Business Partner Private MNC).

For some respondents, primarily those in Director and Business Partner roles, the need for HRM to become more overtly aligned with the business agenda and for practitioners to acquire and demonstrate business acumen, was regarded as essential for the long term future of their professional status. Analysis suggests that gone are the days of 'one size fits all' – as organizations and practitioners are required to fulfil to an increasingly higher standard of excellence, performance and innovation and over the next few years, to embrace new skills and conventions of business practice.

I have depicted the relationship between the organization and the required new skills base in the following diagram:

Diagram One to show the relationship between the organization and the required new skills base.

Personal integrity but meet business needs, acquire new skill set and promote to demonstrate bottom line value = possible new opportunities as BP **Sufficient?**

Practitioner joins organization holding professional CIPD Accreditation. **But not sufficient** Specific business knowledge required to secure credibility

Status and perceived ability to contribute to the business determined by extent of specific organizational and business knowledge **But not sufficient**

In addition to occupationally specific knowledge I suggest that at the strategic level, practitioners will have to acquire stronger business skills, augmented by excellent relationship and communication competencies. They will be required to develop business foresight, strong conceptual skills and a keen sense of their potential to influence business decisions. They will, in sum, be required to act as the designers of organizational architecture and be proactive agents of change. I have depicted the relationship between the organization the individual P/HRM practitioner as illustrated in the diagram below.

Diagram Two to illustrate the relationship between the organization the individual Personnel/HRM practitioner:

> **At the level of the Individual**
>
> The Individual Practitioner has the drive, determination, personal integrity and ability to acquire specific business knowledge and promote the value of the contribution P/HRM can make to the business.
>
> Professional Knowledge plus Specific Business Knowledge plus a New Skills Set plus the Professional Confidence to Promote the function = Recognition, Respect, Status and New Opportunities to Contribute
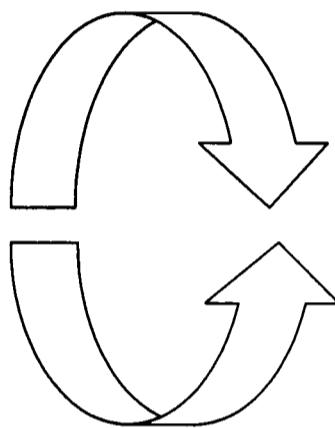
> **At the Level of the Organization**
>
> If all the above occurs **and** organizational structure can be adapted to respond to new accountabilities, lines of communication and reconfigured team structures and the organizational culture is sufficiently independent from externally imposed constraints (government requirements) confident and receptive to 'New ways of Working' to listen to the voice of P/HRM (often associated with appointment of New CEO or HRM Director)
>
> P/HRM can then foster and develop a different working relationship which recognises its potential to contribute to business success. Study shows this is currently most likely to occur in larger MNCs.

7.7   Perceptions of HRM and Professional Tensions

What I have analysed so far presents a rather positive image of HRM's ability to make a valuable contribution to business success in the future, it is important to be realistic and to recognise extant limitations. In this respect, respondents at mid level roles and critical commentators have highlighted the marked difference between the 'rhetoric' and the 'reality' of HRM (Legge 1995a; 1995b). The discourse of HRM, especially at a strategic level, has

promoted a more coherent vision of the function, but quantifiable success appears to be far more difficult to demonstrate in practice, leading some authors to characterize HRM less effective than might be claimed (Hodson and Sullivan 2002:300). The concern with the strategic role of HRM professionals is at the level of practice and implementation. Guest (2001:26) found in a survey of over 1000 managers and Chief Executives, that while those that adopted 'high commitment' HRM practices showed a positive link to business performance, most respondents (90%) did not put people issues as a top priority; marketing and financial matters had much greater importance.

This highlights a key point about strategy-making and implementation revealed in this study. Even when the business strategy and the HRM strategy is given full consideration, there are a number of possible paths or choices open to the decision makers, including cost factors, mergers and acquisitions, technology, marketing. Coleman and Keep (2001) pointed out that even where strategic HR Management is taken seriously, in most cases in the UK, the focus is on profit maximization and cost minimization and this makes HRM issues a third or fourth order consideration. This down playing of the HRM agenda is most significant in terms of evaluating the collective authority and standing of the HRM profession, and as I have already alluded to in this work, the collective image of the occupation as a profession was poor. This diminished professional image was also the finding by Taylor (2002), in a national survey of 2500 employed HRM people. He found that there was little evidence of a 'coherent human resource management agenda' (2002:7) and a 'significant' gap between the rhetoric of what HR purported to achieve and the reality of what HR actually did achieve. There are also a variety of views held by those on the receiving end of HRM practices. It is argued (Maybe et al. 1998) that the voice of such recipients has been under represented and workplace accounts of the delivery of HRM goals such as greater commitment and unified culture, there is little evidence of success and mostly disappointment. The aim of this study was to consider perceptions of profession and being a professional, as a consequence the debate between the rhetoric and reality of HRM's achievements will have to be left to another study. However, three respondents operating in mid level HRM roles, held similarly negative views of the claims made for HRM. The first perception is from Sally, who, while acknowledging the

contribution made to her organization by HRM was eventually successful, she was also realistic in her appraisal of the transition process and of the negative impact it potentially had on the business:

I think it changed the function to be seen as more part of the business at the top level of the organization. However, here maybe for various reasons it failed, I think, to deliver on that level of input. And I think what needed to happen was that basic HR still has an administrator function and in certain areas you must deliver on the basics before you're seen to be able to deliver at a higher level. I mean it has supported some change, I think, at a higher level, some necessary restructuring and it has supported at that level (Sally, a Personnel Manager).

The second perception, that HRM is not always the solution it is purported to be, concerns the perceived failure of HRM to respond to and manage changing business demands, and was at the heart of this second and rather long extract from Mary an HRM Lecturer. Her perception was that while there was much talk about HRM, about business partners and about the contribution HRM can make to business success, Mary considered HRM had somehow lost its way and become schizophrenic and in her words, the 'authors of our own mess':

I think if the changes are not responded to, HR becomes, has a distorted perception. An example for that is the raft of employment changes that happened in the late seventies/eighties, where we became compliance agents, policemen [sic], health and safety is a more modern example of that kind of thing. We are seen to be policemen [sic] and if we don't handle the change effectively, then it can have a negative impact. Another example would be the issue around business partnerships, there is a perception amongst some other elements of, you know, round the board, oh stop bleating, you know, get on with it, demonstrate your worth and if you are worthy of the board then we'll invite you. And that can contrast with the likes of XXXX (an international HRM author and commentator) who basically is saying, well actually, people issues are even more important than they ever were. So it's almost a sort of schizophrenic approach to the perception of HR and I think from the point of the view of the identity of HR, as a profession, I think it's that we've become a little bit too

inward focusing and perhaps we are the authors of our own mess from time to time'
(Mary, an HRM Lecturer).

Mary's comments are significant in the analysis of the data because her perceptions are representative of those practitioners who worked in the public sector, and expressed frustration at not being able to influence HRM policy or practice because they were too far removed from the central power base. While analysis revealed nuanced variation this was delineated by the type of organization for whom the respondent worked. In the smaller private organizations HRM tended to retain an administrative function – principally concerned with ensuring legislative compliance, the scope and power to influence the content or direction of the function was minimal. Among public sector workers there was a resigned acceptance that P/HRM would not attain professional recognition because the organizational structure and culture permitted only a marginal, administrative and transactional role. The knowledge base of the practitioners was generalised but they reported limited opportunity to influence the development of their professional knowledge base or the role itself as illustrated in this example from Eric, an internal Training Officer in Local Government whose frustration was palpable. His spoken word placed considerable emphasis on the word 'all' in a manner that indicated his hands were tied, despite his desire to change the stimulation:

We simply provide a service, because at the end of the day that is all we can do (Eric, a Training Officer in Local Government).

His dissatisfaction with the limited role was not isolated, Sally, a personnel manager was equally angered by the lack of opportunity for personal and role development and in her interview her voice hid no secrets when she said:

I mean I think in the organization here, personnel are very much an administrative, largely administrative function. I don't think it has developed, the personnel function as far as some other organizations, its largely administrative support and it certainly lags behind other organizations (Sally, a Personnel Manager).

The third perception of how HRM might not be the panacea it is often presented as, comes from Linda, a well grounded and realistic HR Lecturer. Her comment concerning the extent to which the function has changed resonates with the literature from Evetts (2003) for whom notions of HRM best practice suggest a discourse of professionalism that is being used both to effect change in the institutions and occupations where professionals work, as well as to discipline and control professional practitioners in their work' (Evetts 2003:29). Kochan (2004:134) too warned that one of the dangers of moving from personnel to strategic HRM and business partner involved a realignment of occupational identity which could result in the function acting on behalf of the organization – as an agent of the social control. While this study did not reveal sentiments as strong as those voiced by Evetts (2003) or Kochan (2004), Linda's comments in particular, indicated a degree of uncertainly about the direction of HRM as not all respondents saw the change to the role of HRM as a positive development. Linda, an ex HRM Practitioner and now an HRM Lecturer, considered the profession had already gone too far and become too business focused, hard and distant. Although her comment was the only one in this vein, it is nonetheless an interesting perception:

> There is something I really began to dislike about HR, I was moving from the old personnel into probably becoming more of a sort of change agent, you know, I was doing a lot more HR type activities. And I know there's quite a move away but.....I think we've gone too far and got awful hard ....our image has changed from being there to make a difference and to be supportive. And I would say that's true in every organization but the image is much more of a hard line or people don't matter so much, you know, life/work balance, you know, that they pay lip service to it but, again, this is only my perception (Linda, a HRM Lecturer).

Linda's comments, that HR has 'gone too far' and 'got awful hard', suggests her perception is that the function has changed and that instead of being able to locate the employee at the centre of her thinking, as she had when she first entered the occupation, Linda was now being forced to surrender natural instinct and need to 'look after people' to the needs of the business. In other words, Linda's perception of her role was as an 'agent of the organization' and not a free independent practitioner. Hanlon (1999) talked of the trend towards

'commercialised professionalism' by which he meant the exercise of professional expertise has been reconfigured in order to support the process of capital accumulation – or the explicit needs of the business to make a profit.

As a consequence, the capacity of P/HRM to develop and maintain a traditional, classical model of professional status as an independent and largely self governing occupation becomes severely compromised. What lay behind Linda's feeling that 'things have gone too far' was her sense of a lost independence and an inability to act in a kind and supportive way towards others – an aspect of the job which represented her reason for entering into the occupation in the first instance. Linda spoke of her personal identity as a kind and caring person being 'lost' in the mêlée of a business driven agenda, to the point that she feared the perception 'we have got awful hard' was being interpreted as a reflection of herself – and so understandably hard to reconcile.

The competing tensions between self and the needs of the organization expressed by Linda were also described by two other respondents. Practitioners illustrated occasions where they experienced a degree of what they somewhat euphemistically described as 'organizational influence' over their decision making which highlighted the tension between their desire to be true to themselves and a concomitant desire to be loyal to the organization that employed them and paid their salary, as shown in this following quotation from Robin. Robin's words give rise to a perception of professional compromise as he talks of knowing what he 'should' do to challenge the behaviour of the organization and then what he 'actually' does:

> It's all about how the organization and the influence of the organization might actually compromise an individual's professional integrity because individually you might want to say, no, that isn't appropriate or that issue needs to be addressed but actually, I'm not going to be the one that does it because if I do it, organizationally I'm going to leave myself out on a limb. I might upset one or two key players and my job security might be jeopardised, therefore I recognise it's an issue and professionally I recognise I should be challenging it but actually I'm not going to (Robin, an HR Consultant).

As a consultant Robin felt he had a privileged position in being able to extricate himself from the consultancy relationship and effectively walk away from the influence of the organization if he considered his professional integrity was being compromised too far, however he also recognised that not all practitioners were as well placed as he was and that for some the pressures were different:

Well at the macro level, if I was in the, let's say I was an NHS HR Director, I would have to sort of, I assume they've all done it, they have to say, we're living in a political environment, there are things we cannot influence, there are things we can influence. Now the things we cannot influence - are they sufficiently important that I walk away from the job to keep my pride or do I just play with the cards I've got? And thank god, they play with the cards they've got. At an individual level, I certainly know of two or three influences where members have been asked to do things that are illegal and what is the member's allegiance to their profession? Well once you've said to your boss, I recommend you don't do this because it's illegal and the boss ignores your advice, then you've discharged your professional responsibilities. You might wish to walk away from it after that but.......you can't (Robin, an HR Consultant).

A similar perception of being influenced by the demands of the organization was described by Nigel:

Other people have drawn attention to the fact that I am a professional but sometimes what the organization demands of me comprises my professionalism because I am being asked to do things that I do not actually think are right but the organization is putting pressure on me to do that. I can recognise that and I say, I'll do it because you pay me but you do realise that I'm compromising my position (Nigel, an HR Director with a private venture capital group).

The experiences described above gave a clear focus to the potential of the organization to attempt to influence the professional actions of the individual. They also reinforced the earlier perception that practitioners were responsible for and mediators of their own professional

conduct and behaviour, as illustrated again by Jane, HR Director in a Scottish based MNC when discussing her perceptions of being influenced:

> I suppose being professional is not saying or doing things because others expect it. Professional's not hierarchical and it's not compliant to others out with what you're actually there for. It's not acting on any other external influences other than what you are, technically, what your knowledge tells you to do (Jane, HR Director in a Scottish based MNC).

In analysing the implications of organizational influence on professionals and their roles is to recognise that most, if not all, managerial groups seeking control of professional workers will have professional agendas of their own, and it is these hidden agendas which ultimately constrain the possibilities for sweeping change. Professional careers are strongly institutionalized in that they are shaped by a process of shared culture and process socialization. Organizations seeking to shape professional norms and influence professional work and the individual practitioners executing the work appear to be converging, both across and within professional work settings. Evidence to substantiate overall claims of a direct and incontrovertible control over professional work is slipping into the realms of corporate and bureaucratic myth, the finding from this study was organizational 'influence' – yes; 'control' - no.

In summary, the study revealed variation in the extent to which the organization was perceived to exert influence over the practitioner's decisions, but interestingly, this was not always perceived to be in a negative way. In this final example the influence was welcomed, and was to the point were personal integrity became so aligned with the requirements of the organization there was perceived to be no difference. As Rosie, an HR Director in a private MNC explained, her loyalties were firmly attached to the organization:

> I see my role as being in support of the business not, I don't have a position other than in supporting the outcome of what the business does here (Rosie, an HR Director).

Respondents with a more transactional role such as Fiona, who worked in the public sector for an emergency rescue service, the extent to which the organization could influence decisions seemed to be less. Fiona stuck fiercely to the letter of the law and was in her own words 'administratively compliant':

> In the two and a half years I've been here, that has been the case, that I have influenced their idea of what HR is by giving sound HR advice on a number of issues, for example, a number of tricky disciplinaries that would have gone wrong without professional advice, consultation with employees that undoubtedly would have gone haywire without me insisting, fairly strongly, that we do it in a certain way. In the way that we deal with sickness, in the way that we deal with managing managers and training managers to manage properly. So there's a range of areas where my influence, I hope, and the influence of my team, has influenced how HR is now perceived (Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service).

In terms of perceptual variation, there appeared to be a separation between the enactment of personnel policies as an 'administrative process' which remained largely free from the influence of the organization and the more 'transformational and strategic roles' which were subject to the organizational influence described above.

Analysis so far has emphasised the growing extent to which the individual practitioner is deemed responsible for cultivating their own professional identity. It has suggested this will be achieved in part, through the acquisition of enhanced business acumen. This will enable more active participation in the wider business arena and present opportunities for practitioners to exert greater organizational influence. As a consequence of 'playing in new areas', the image of the occupation as a profession and perceptions of the individual as a professional will be enhanced. If, as I am suggesting, the future success of the occupation is so heavily reliant on the actions of individual practitioner, where does that position the professional institute?

The emergence of a professional identity for P/HRM over the past 10 years appears to have increased the demand and market value of those with specialized professional preparation, even though the function is still be characterized as having weak professional status (Freidson, 1986): staff enter the profession with diverse sets of educational and occupational backgrounds; entry into the profession is neither regulated nor difficult and even now there is little standardisation and formalisation in the theoretical and practical knowledge base of the field. Research on university P/HRM education (McLean 2005, Gillmore and Williams 2007) indicates that despite the increasing demands of P/HRM practice and the broadening of the knowledge domains and skill sets required of successful practitioners. The need for increased attention to alternative frameworks to understand the complex relationship between individuals and work organizations has become all the more salient during recent years because of the overemphasis on 'soft skills' rather than increasing commercial awareness, skills and acumen; or in short the knowledge, skills and attitudes increasingly demanded of practitioners by the organizations and increasingly required by practitioners if they are to be successful and further the professional status of the occupation. Herein lies a further tension between the notion of profession and of being a professional. The charge is that current educational programmes equip practitioners with the skills to belong to an outdated and outmoded version of a profession – with its roots in social and collective cohesion, robust and respected professional institutional control and independence from the excessive and inappropriate demands made by external stakeholders to act or behave in a less then professional manner.

The reality however, as identified in this study is markedly different and the voices of Robin a senior consultant and Mary, an HR Lecturer bore witness to this tension.

One aspect of the intrinsic tension lies in the fact that educational programmes This critical dilemma for the goals and aims of practitioners revolves around the extent to which their activities should be focused on supporting the goals of the organization at all cost and so possibly compromise their internal professional integrity and invite the charge of complicity for bad outcomes, or is it incumbent upon the field and its practitioners to challenge and resist

when this is needed to uphold its ethical tenets? Should P/HRM position itself as a complicit support function and subsystem in support of supra-ordinate goals, or does it claim a set of professional values and convictions that create the professional obligation to be, on occasion, in opposition? These tensions, admittedly broad, nonetheless invite reflexive thinking over the political and ethical dimensions and appear important both from both an empirical ("what is") and normative ("what should be") perspective. They were not resolved in this study – but did highlight the need for educators to prepare students for these competing roles, to provide a clear understanding of the different professional cultures and organizational socialization processes of practitioners and to provide a realistic preview of their future roles and so remove the unquestioned assumption of unitary cultures and goals of different professional groups and stakeholders. To help prepare current and further practitioners to manage the innate tensions inherent in the role, the development of professional skills – the 'know what' remains a prerequisite. However, to be of real value these skills must be underpinned, further developed and augmented by a broader understanding of the transformative and critical function that P/HRM might provide when it becomes competent in managing its own professional identity, the 'Know how'. The innate tensions will only be resolved when practitioners are confident in their organizational status and position to challenge and when they are secure in their individual professional integrity...We will, I suggest. will only start to realise this when a deeper and more radical assessment of the aims and means of educating future P/HRM practitioners becomes an integrtaed part of the professional and eduactaional discourse and culture.

7.8   Perceptions of the Professional Institute

In this study the professional institution was perceived as either being left somewhere on the periphery or as a relevant body. Those respondents who regarded membership of the CIPD as irrelevant for their organizational role and of limited use for their broader personal and career development did not engage with it at all – beyond paying their membership subscription to allow them to keep their designated title of Chartered Member or Chartered Fellow as Karen described:

The whole CIPD thing...I think they need to be far clearer, establish the need for the CIPD to someone like me, because as I have just said to you, I've largely stayed away from it's largely been irrelevant (Karen, a Business Partner with the MOD).

It was also perceived as weak and ineffective in maintaining professional standards, as having no provision to exclude unprofessional or recalcitrant members and of being confused in its direction and identity.

Until the CIPD changes its role, I don't think they're likely to raise the profile of HR outside of the profession greatly (Chris, a Diversity Manager in the Public Sector).

The CIPD was perceived as trying to reconcile and balance competing interests emanating from the tensions between its role as a commercial enterprise and its role as a charity concerned with the representation of a profession. The picture was further confused by what practitioners perceived as an unhealthy preoccupation with increasing membership numbers.

This last point was made most forcefully by Mary, an HRM lecturer in a Scottish University, when she referred to it as 'schizophrenic'. While also shared by others and probably accurate for the present, does not necessarily imply it is a permanent diagnosis but does reflect the extent to which practitioners perceived the CIPD to have competing interests and agendas which were serving to compromise its independence as a Professional Institute and dilute the focus of its activities. Mary also commented on the apparent business focus of the CIPD:

The CIPD ...I think they're being driven by business; there are tensions between the function of HR being seen as a profession and the agenda of the CIPD as a business (Mary, an HRM Lecturer in a Large Scottish University).

While all the respondents acknowledged their membership only six were active members. The remaining fourteen were either ambivalent or strongly critical of the Institute and its lack of relevance. As Janice outlined: 'I think externally, it doesn't really do much for selling the story, if you like' (Janice, an HR Business Partner Private MNC).

For many interviewees the professional HRM Institute was seen as not only lacking in the character of its membership but also in its dated image of HRM work, based on the negative administrative identity of personnel work from which they sought to distance themselves. Interestingly, such perceptions have persisted despite the professional association's recent advocacy of a prescriptive HRM internal consulting model (Dainty 2007). Where respondents did acknowledge external occupational allegiances, these tended to be of a more informal character and emphasized distinct occupational sub-groups in terms of hierarchy or expertise. Hence, several of the more senior respondents talked about their involvement in small groups of HR Directors that met on a regular basis to socialize and discuss issues of interest. Typically, these groups were characterized as an elite that was contrasted with the formal HRM Institute and were perceived to be meeting the needs of the members more effectively than the CIPD.

One of the most striking comments related to CIPD was that it was considered to be so preoccupied with increasing membership levels it was perceived as compromising (potentially or actually) its professional image and credibility by failing to observe what were regarded as fundamental characteristics of being a profession. This was most evident when certain respondents talked of the process of upgrading from Graduate Member to that of Chartered Member. The requirements for Chartered Status are currently (January 2009) professional CIPD accreditation at Graduate Level plus three years experience at management level. The perception was that Chartered Status was being awarded to practitioners who did not meet the criteria. Thus, the focus on increasing membership was perceived as compromising the status of Chartered Member and signalling a focus on quantity rather than quality. Assessment of the applicant's suitability for upgrading is made by a National Upgrading Panel convened by the CIPD. The perception that upgrading to Chartered Member was being made 'too easy' were characterised by this quote from Janice, an HR Business Partner Private MNC:

> I think its back to the perception thing. I would have to say, it's probably far too easy
>
> to become a member or to move up within that, having sponsored one or two people
>
> who have gone for upgrade. I was in two minds whether or not to agree to do it

because I didn't think, well one in particular was ready and I actually thought the application would be objected but it wasn't. So I'm not convinced that they're as strict as they might be and I think that's a pity because that will dilute the status of chartered (Janice, an HR Business Partner Private MNC).

Her concerns over quality were shared by Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service:

I mean I think there are big issues in terms of how we might regulate the quality of the individuals who are members of the Profession (Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service).

Gill, an HR Manager Private SME with several years experience, was audibly horrified by what was happening when she said:

I've got it (Chartered Status) because I have been a senior manager. I know that there was only a handful of us on the course that I did, who had the degree of experience at management level that I had, you could count them on one hand, but when I saw the names of people published who had got chartered status, I was quite surprised and disappointed, actually, because I thought that would be quite hard to achieve. And I felt I'd just got there and I'm working my way towards the next level because of my involvement in strategy on a totally different level but I was surprised. And some of the names that were on there, I would not have, having known them, I would not have thought they would be eligible for chartered status, which kind of makes me feel, maybe it's not as respected as I would like it to be (Gill, an HR Manager Private SME).

To illustrate further, the stated target of the CIPD is to increase membership from 125,000 in 2007 to 150,000 by 2010. It will achieve this by 'widening participation', increasing 'flexible routes' to membership and 'realigning' the professional qualification system. Some respondents feared it would be at the expense of the identity of P/HRM as a profession as standards became diluted and lowered in order to attract higher numbers. What were

apparent from the study were the tensions, financial in origin, which were influencing, if not driving, the focus of activities undertaken by the professional institute.

These were perceived by the respondents to be at odds with the once accepted role of the professional institute as a gatekeeper of standards. Analysis indicates the economic imperatives stimulating this transition in the role and function of the professional institute is one that may require members to re-evaluate its perceived purpose. As understood from the sociological literature of the professions market closure refers to the ability of the profession to preserve its exclusivity and thereby ensure a continuation of the privileges and status afforded to its members. Such exclusivity has been assured by controlling access to the profession via educational credentials and networking among elite members. In the capitalist climate of the Twenty First Century, market closure has been transmuted to mean the ability of the CIPD to market itself to potential members in order to increase entry to that particular profession at the expense of an alternative but possibly equally valid professional body. 'Market Closure' thus comes to mean an out positioning of other rival Institutes, in this instance this may include the 'Institute of Leadership and Management', the 'Institute of Leadership' or the 'Institute of Directors', all of which are actively seeking to 'poach' CIPD members by offering preferential subscriptions rates and enhanced legal/professional advice and support. The requirement was for the CIPD to be much stronger and demonstrate rigour and independence; it was being urged to demonstrate and to uphold its own professional standards.

7.9   Implications for Practice

In the context of P/HRM the pursuit of professional status based on the realisation of a series of traits embodied in an occupational collective or via a professional project is unlikely to be realised in the classical sense. Changes in organizational structures, globalisation and downsizing have, if anything, thrown the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions that have long characterised P/HRM roles into sharper relief. Concepts such as 'commercialised professionalism' or 'organizational professional' have found their way into the professional lexicon and have served to foster a revised perception of what a profession is and what being

a professional means and have located the individual at the centre. The implications for educational practice and policy are for educators to attempt to convey the expectation of self-governance to new career entrants. There are also implications for the way in which the CIPD professional development scheme can be deployed to help students develop the skills needed to manage a different sort of employee/organization relationship. It will demand a new type of psychological contract in which balanced and transformational contracts replace the transactional contracts of the past. There are implications for the professional institute, in particular the necessity to address how it might effectively support membership at the level of the individual.

A further implication emerging from this particular question relates to the rising influence of the employing organization in defining the type of knowledge required. In the past the CIPD has been instrumental in defining what professional knowledge is required but this role could easily be occupied by the employing organization. The potential then exists for the fragmentation of the occupation as we witness the evolution of the 'organizational professional' and the gradual dissolution of the CIPD as its role and relevance is assumed by the individual with the support of their respective work organization. This too has implications for educational practice and policy as organizations seek to develop and accredit 'best fit' and bespoke programmes of education and training which are internally accredited and which exclude the CIPD. It seems that whilst the pursuit of professional status for the PI/HRM role can perhaps be understood as a 'project' (Larson 1977) data from this study suggests its enactment is played out in increasingly ambiguous and fluctuating environments which are in the main defined by the employing organizations. For the occupation there is only limited consensus or agreement as to what constitutes required 'knowledge' beyond that offered by the basic professional accreditation scheme as it is largely defined by the organization There is a heavy reliance on the individual practitioner to balance personal integrity and professional influence with the demands of the business and as educators we have a responsibility to help equip students with the skills they will need to manage this professional dichotomy . Perhaps one way is to support students and new entrants to develop a mind set that sees professional accreditation as simply a first step rather than an end result and encourages (if not mandated)

their continuing professional development which focuses on the development and deployment of a new skill set to support problem solving, operating at the margins and transferring non-codified knowledge.

Analysis leads me to suggest that in order for P/HRM to move from being regarded as an aspiring profession, to become an established profession the 'necessary knowledge' required by practitioners will need to encompass considerably more general business, operational and financial awareness than has been evident to date. In the future and in order to differentiate themselves from others involved in managing people, HR practitioners will need to possess and demonstrate 'know how' as well as 'know what'. This study suggests that acquisition of 'know how' is achieved by a determination on the part of the individual to learn new business skills, promote themselves as an equal business partner, to evidence their considerable knowledge base and to demonstrate how HRM can make a quantifiable contribution to the business success of the organization.

7.10   Chapter Summary

The chapter concludes that transactional activities associated with personnel management have less professional imagery than the more strategic activities associated with Human Resource Management. This perception was important because it highlighted the skills and abilities of the individual practitioner as being axiomatic in their pursuit of professional recognition. In so doing it gave rise to perceptions of profession and of being a professional, as represented and embodied within the 'individual' – perhaps to a greater extent than being established by the collective. While not wishing to confuse Weber's use of the term 'profession' with the more positive and normative reading of the role of the professions as a force for social cohesion and ethical solidarity, this analysis does move away from a traditional Weberian portrayal of the professions articulated by Larsons (1977) and McDonald (1995) in which profession was presented as a 'positive social category' for the maintenance of society – and moves towards one in locates the individual (rather than social or collective good will) at the centre.

Perceptions of organizational role and individual status emerged important themes in this study and are significant because they echo recent normative discourse (Wright 2008) which asserts the path to improved status for HRM professionals does involve a reinvention of their roles. As we have seen, this can contribute to enhanced status both within the organization and at the level of the individual practitioner, but it did not appear to equate to raising the broader identity of the HRM Profession as a whole. In fact, the focus on individual professional identity seemed to undermine any pretence to a strong unitary and cohesive occupational identity. The principal outcome is therefore one in which the occupation of HRM does not appear to regard itself as a collective and as a consequence, membership of the external HRM Professional Institute was seen as irrelevant for the practitioners' organizational role and of limited use for their broader personal and career development.

Professionalism was regarded as a contextual competence rather than as a general capability. Practical knowledge, experience, familiarity and the utilization of practice knowledge were stressed over theoretical knowledge and formal education. While this study has evidenced the ability of some senior practitioners to influence their roles and reinvent their professional self image, the real impetus for change has generally been external to the occupation. Any symbolic act of synthesis – the creation of a new HR Profession, may simply engender a new chaotic antithesis. In other words; even if the people management occupation was able to embrace a new status and acquire the rhetorical gloss of a new identity in its quest for professionalism, it maybe unable to banish completely or abandon the 'old myths' (Ulrich 1997) that have haunted it of old and served to limit its professional image.

Professionalism was also interpreted as a phenomenon of individuals and organizations. Perhaps, by way of conclusion, I can suggest that what we are witnessing is a shift in the way the professions and being a professional are both constructed and perceived. That this study is evidencing a reconfiguration of 'profession' and of 'being a professional'. A construction that takes us away from ideas of social good, unity and a similarly skilled and knowledgeable professional collective; towards a construction in which it is the individual practitioner whose professional credibility lies not in their allegiance to any Professional Institute with its own

members list and code of conduct; but in their own allegiance and loyalty first to themselves, and second to their work organization.

In drawing this analysis to an end, I make three points. I recognise that in reality the freedom and the scope of the practitioners to influence their status within the organization may not be as straightforward as some of the practitioner's comments have implied and that their status will be affected by the structure, the internal political agenda, external legislative requirements and other resource constraints. I also recognise the argument potentially becomes self-fulfilling, in that securing status and credibility will be easier if the practitioner holds at least some influence in the first place. Thirdly, I acknowledge the possibility of a reverse of the relationship, in which the organization influences the remit of the practitioner and ultimately the image of profession as a whole. I will discuss this aspect later in the analysis however; the discussion so far has provided an insight into why the division between personnel and HRM remains such an important perception among practitioners and is still viewed as a key staging post in the pursuit of full professional recognition.

Chapter Eight   Concluding Reflections

8.1   Chapter Overview

The preceding chapters have dealt comprehensively with the conceptual, theoretical and methodological aspects of the present research. They have reviewed and synthesised a range of literature, presented, analysed and interpreted the data and argued for the re-conceptualisation of profession and being a professional into one in which the individual assumes centre stage and the role of the collective as a unity and identity recedes to the margins. In this final chapter I draw together the separate aspects and provide a summation of the principal perceptions of the research and suggest the way forward.

8.2   Thesis Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to critically evaluate the notion of professionalism in the contemporary context and to suggest a way forward that would enhance the professionals' work. As society changes, so the social and cultural context of professionalism alters and the meaning of the term has not so much to be redefined as reinterpreted in this context. I suggest that what has occurred in recent years, is a change in the Zeitgeist of such proportions that one is justified in speaking of a shift to 'new times' and of a particular reinterpretation of professionalism in the light of these new circumstances.

In many respects data from this study mirrored and reinforced the sociological understanding of the professions reviewed at the start of the thesis. Respondents defined professions as exemplified by the possession of certain discernable characteristics including formal training, knowledge and an independent yet powerful collective. A contemporary analysis of a profession based on traditional traits, the result of a professional project and the result of power relations, can therefore be seen as remaining valid, except, that is in its application to the occupation.

Respondents did not apply the same characteristics to their own occupation. Perceptions of profession and of being a professional were characterised by an unanticipated emphasis on individuation and a strong attachment to the organization, which suggest a new form of

professionalism. Crucial to the practice of a new professionalism was the emphasis on the work organizations and on democratic collaboration as a basis for rational communication in the context of uncertainty which characterizes 'new times'. In suggesting a way forward, the discussion focuses on the bureaucratic constraints on a collaborative model of organizational life and in particular on the way these constraints can be exposed by analyses of the way modern power or what Foucault described as 'disciplinary power' works. Certainly, the study evidenced that organizations have been and still are being restructured and that professionals have become more accountable to the market. In theory this could have generated the conditions in which the practitioner became empowered to act as a source of solidarity, community and collective unity and yet this potential development was not observed in this study, in other words the sense of a collective identity was not a strongly held or significant perception. Equally, any sense of debureaucratization or a realignment of professional relationships did not generate aggregates of self-sufficient competing individuals, striving for supremacy – respondents did not perceive there to be radical completion or disharmony among the occupation.

The literature, and in particular the work of Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2006a and b), argued that such changes in organizational structures and markets often concealed the extent to which power remained dominant and unexposed in work organizations. They talked of a 'disciplinary logic' being exerted by one group of individuals over other individuals in an attempt to attain power and control over their actions and status. This, suggested Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2006 a and b), was achieved by tactics of monitoring and surveillance and represented a staging point in the evolution of the new professions. Respondents were aware of the issues of individual power and of organizational influence and these issues did reinforce the need for a greater sensitivity towards the role of the organization in the construction of the selves of professionals and their stance towards their own expertise and their colleagues. But, and perhaps reassuringly, the study did not uncover the degree of negativity or surveillance suggested by Fournier (1999) and Evetts (2006a and b) and where interaction with others did occur, it was most often in the context of positive exchanges and the deliberate sharing of knowledge and practice.

The study evidenced perceptions of a profession as a 'free collective' with each member demonstrating a strong allegiance to their respective work organizations. It evidenced a perception of being a professional as an individual concern that involved the general acquisition and demonstration of a necessary occupational knowledge ('know what') and an individually acquired knowledge that went beyond the traditional knowledge boundaries of the occupation. This other knowledge – the 'know how' was business specific and attained only through the efforts of the individual practitioner; it became a central feature of what I conclude to be the professional project of the self, and as a consequence, one of the principle differentiators between those members of the occupation who perceive themselves and the occupation to be an aspiring profession and those members who continue to operate at a level of practice which is not regarded as being professional.

In other words, this study concludes that practitioners who actively secure a business knowledge base that exceeds occupational knowledge, have the individual skills to engage in new stakeholder relationships, demonstrate their acumen and influence secure a higher organizational regard and elevated status. One of the main explanations for this difference lies in the knowledge base of professionals, the source expertise, has become less secure. From an epistemological viewpoint, there have been changes in the way we typically understand the nature of knowledge and what it means to know. Professionals can no longer claim that their knowledge is a theory-free, unbiased and an objective source of expertise; like all knowledge, it is located within a paradigm or 'language game' which has its own discourse rules and truth criteria from which to describe and explain the 'world'. However, the problematic nature of professional knowledge is entwined with another difference that the fallibility and provisionality of formal knowledge and of the importance of connecting with local knowledge in an increasingly diverse cultural world imply new forms of professional community and new partnership arrangements with organizations.

The future of the professional practitioner will, I suggest, be characterized by the generation of shared knowledge constructed through dialogue between all parties in a particular context rather than through the 'top–down' application of a universal, 'objective' professional expertise.

The research indicates that many practitioners have 'come to identify themselves and conceive of their interests in terms of these new words and images' (Du Gay, 1995:53). The weakness of the collective 'professional project' in P/HRM, combined with a concurrent emphasis on the acquisition of business knowledge, has facilitated the emergence of a 'professional project of the self' in which professionals are increasingly working alone on their objectives, developing codes of professional conduct based on personal integrity and trust, assuming responsibility for their own continuing professional development, willingly engaging in the mutual assessment of professionalism and operating in synergy with the organization to foster a relationship which will ultimately replace their previous one with the CIPD.

In other words, in the absence of a well-developed collective project, HRM Practitioners are developing their own interpretation of professionalism as comprising (a) being knowledgeable about the business as well as having a specialised knowledge base which is determined by their role and the organization, (b) applying that knowledge to support the realisation of organizational aims and business objectives and (c) acknowledging responsibility for their own conduct while being aware of and monitoring, in a positive manner, the conduct of others. I am suggesting the 'professional project of the self' has resulted because of the need for the individual to assume responsibility for their own knowledge and professional development. This research revealed a subtle role adopted by the organization in which the very construct of knowledge, skill and competence were very much contextualised and mediated through a combination of the individual and the organization. Particularly so in the larger MNCs, where their ability to define and promote professionalism appeared to be more developed.

This new 'knowledge and skill' differentiated understanding of profession and being a professional as revealed by this study clearly has implications for educational practice. An indispensable part of this understanding involves getting to grips with the culture of dominant educational practice, with the norms and values and philosophy that guide policy development in the occupation and the Professional Institution. In other words the challenge for professional educators is to ensure the curriculum reflects the new rules of the game for getting on in the organization; and at a deeper level, the shared business orientated

assumptions and beliefs which operate often at an unconscious level and yet define the organization's taken-for-granted view of itself and its environment. The reconfigured enactment of professionalism relies on the individual acting as an agent of professional influence and power, and to understand the implications this has for the skills and knowledge they will require in order to be effective and successful. It is concerned with the bringing about of a certain kind of individual with certain kinds of characteristics.

This does not arise because practitioners in modern societies are suddenly acting as individual agents but rather because individual professional identity has itself become a product of new organizational demands, and must therefore be articulated and validated in a redesigned professional curriculum which supports the accreditation of practitioners. The knowledge gained from the study of the various subject disciplines, such as employment law, recruitment and selection, training and development undoubtedly remains valid – but insufficient. The entreaty is for wider recognise at the level of the academic institution and the professional institution to extend what is taught; to include recognition of the need to focus on institutional processes and context of professional practice, and by implication, this necessitates inclusion of business matters, organizational politics, individual influence and professional power.

The process of education and learning then becomes more obviously entwined with professional experience and has within its construction an implication that space is provided for reflection in the professional community and that the individual retains a sense of agency in a collaborative context. In this context the practitioner develops the 'know how skills' of a genuinely reflexive and reflective practitioner: lack of dogmatic certainty; a willingness to tolerate ambiguity; 'healthy' scepticism; the ability to use abstract concepts; a values-led view of self-in-the-world; awareness of dilemmas, tensions, ambiguities and contradictions; a sense of the self 'becoming' and a sense of history continuing. The latter would entail the acceptance of a non-reified view of the self, one for example that did not rely on concepts of a 'natural' self or on a trait model of professionalism or on a power theory of the individual in a social context. This is not an educational agenda transfixed by self fascination and

organizational politics, rather it is an attempt to chart the way of the new professional project of the self as one that is necessarily concerned with a wider and politically nuanced curriculum.

The new professionalism should have a similar social and moral purpose to the traditional professionalism as described in review of the literature, but it must be more self-conscious about the need to create and recreate an awareness of business cultures and politicized reflexive selves. These aspects are interrelated. The focus must be realigned, while still ensuring the acquisition of necessary occupational 'know what' it must be supplemented by the acquisition of a greater self-knowledge with the parallel development of 'know how'. The new professional, therefore, is one who regards expertise not as 'disciplinary knowledge', but rather as the judicious use of expertise which is free from domination by a particular knowledge form.

The implications for educational practice are to support the new professional to recognise that central to their professional activity is their quest to understand the business environment and to recognise that it is not a fixed entity - but is ever-changing and to appropriate the skills to operate in such an environment. The challenge for educators is to encourage practitioners to recognise that while organizations might be ideologically complex they are not inherently antiprofessional, rather they now look for the individual practitioner to assume responsibility for their own integrity and knowledge which accords with the business needs. This, I believe is the challenge for the 'new professionalism' and for educators involved in the process of training further generations of practitioners.

8.3   The Contribution Made by the Study

This study has contributed to understanding in two significant ways. First it has made a contribution to the way in which we understand and use phenomenography as a research tool. Most phenomenographic studies rely on the reading of verbatim transcripts as the starting point for data analysis. I considered this approach missed out essential data which was encapsulated in the spoken word but not always evident in the written word, the process of

data analysis therefore started by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews. I believe that by adapting the approach to phenomenographic data analysis I have contributed to enhancing the richness of the available data and to enhancing the reliability and validity of the research study.

The second contribution this work has made is in reconstructing the definition of a profession and of being a professional. Traditional conceptions of a profession being characterised by the presence of a set of traits which characterise a collective occupational group have been replaced by the phenomenon of the individual. The conclusion casts responsibility for the enactment of professionalism firmly within the remit of the individual practitioner and emphasises the need for the practitioner to acquire a knowledge base that is wider and more business oriented than that defined as necessary occupational knowledge. The conclusions from the study identified a link between the skills of networking, liaison, communication and self promotion held by the practitioner and their ability to promote the function within the organization. It has defined the relationship between the individual and the employing organization not as one of manipulative control but as one of symbiotic harmony, although inherent professional tensions are not ignored. Finally, it has located the role of the Professional Institution at the margins of professional activity. In summary, this thesis has contributed by offering a new interpretation of existing theory.

8.4   Limitations of the Study

Undertaking the study revealed several areas where improvements to the design and methodology could have been made. However none of the limitations identified have adversely affected the reliability or validity of this data set or the value of the research findings. With the value of hindsight the first improvement would have been to limit the scope of the research. Eliciting perceptions of a profession and of being a professional generated a vast amount of data. Perceptions of just one aspect, for example perceptions of the influence of the Professional Institute the CIPD on the status of the function would have been sufficient to elicit sufficient data for the purpose of the doctorate and to be of value to educational policy and practice.

When designing the study and selecting the organizations for inclusion, I deliberately attempted to ensure representation across all sectors (excluding the Voluntary sector). While this certainly added to the value of the study and the interest of the findings, sufficient valuable data would have been generated if the focus had been with just one sector, for example the public sector. A future study could then have compared and contrasted the findings.

A third possible limitation is the absence of a third voice. My voice as the researcher is present, as is that of the respondent but the voice of other stakeholders in the relationship are absent. This limited the opportunities for corroboration and endorsement. Undertaking interviews with users of the function within the respective organizations would have been worthy of consideration, although this would have extended the scope of the work even further.

Perhaps the single most significant limitation of the research design was the chosen methodology. The aim of the study was to elicit perceptions, and for that purpose a phenomenographic study was entirely appropriate and well chosen. Equally, the use of semi-structured interviews was consistent with the methodology and appropriate to the aims of the study. However, by adopting a phenomenographic approach there was no scope to verify or triangulate the data. A perception remained exactly that – a perception. To illustrate, in the concluding section I indicated how Rosie from a large private MNC spoke of having promoted the role and contribution of the HRM function within the organization to the extent she was about to be offered a seat on the board. I also referred to Fiona, an HR Director for an emergency rescue service, spoke of how she too had enhanced the strategic role of the HRM function and secured a seat on the board. A feature of a phenomenographic approach is to accept the perceptions offered. The role of the researcher is not to question the validity of the perception or to challenge it or even question it. Therefore I did not seek documentary verification of their perceptions; I did not ask to review organizational charts or to see the minutes of the meetings to verify their position on the board. The research, the findings,

analysis and subsequent conclusions were therefore based only on the respondents' perceptions.

8.5 Further Research

CIPD (2007) research into the status of the P/HRM profession in the UK revealed a strengthening of the strategic role of the HRM professional, an active role in strategic decision making and similar involvement on senior committees. The findings suggest that organizational structures are adapting and providing HRM with an opportunity to participate at the senior level. This study has demonstrated the extent to which the achievement of this strategic role is heavily dependent on the motivation and ability of the individual practitioner to not only gain essential occupational knowledge - the 'know what'; but also to develop and apply professional 'know how' in the execution of their roles. This study has demonstrated that in order to have organizational influence, practitioners are required to develop acute business awareness, a high level of political understanding, develop the skills of self-promotion and critical self-reflection, exert influencing skills and demonstrate occupational 'know how'. I have described it as the professional project of the self.

There is a need for further research to explore the detail of this development, to explore the effects of new organizational forms and changing demands, to understand individual responses to them and the consequences for the professions as a collective and the role of associated Professional Institutions. Long term research needs to look at how the changing pattern of relationships unfolds and to explore further the educational implications. How will practitioners gain the support they need to promote themselves in organizations, how will they develop the skills of self reflection and political surety, what role will be played by the academic institutions and are the staff in those establishments equipped with the skills necessary to deliver a revitalised curriculum.

The next phase of this research will therefore include teasing out these and related features using vignettes which will allow the completion of disciplinary coverage and a coherent and comprehensive plan for focussed, problem-oriented research. The approach demanded will

be of a multi-disciplinary nature so as to foster the objective integration of open debate with

an enhanced theoretical understanding combined with a review of professional practice and

policy development.

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Appendix One: Details of the Pilot Study

1.1 Overview

This appendix describes in detail the pilot study I undertook for the research study. It describes why I considered an initial study to be a vital stage in the research process. It describes why I initially considered focus groups an appropriate method of data collection for a phenomenographic study and why I subsequently decided this was not the case.

The appendix is valuable because it demonstrates how the learning I derived from undertaking and reflecting on the pilot study made a valuable contribution to my professional development as a researcher and academic supervisor. As a researcher because through my experience of the pilot study I gained confidence that my final decision to adopt individual semi-structured interviews was the correct one. As an academic supervisor; because I had tried and experienced focus groups and interviews I gained confidence in my ability to guide students who were considering employing them as their primary research method.

1.2 Pilot Studies

Effective social science research indicates the use of a pilot study (Sampson 2004, Brown et al. 2008) is considered good practice. As a consequence in December 2005 I undertook a pilot study to test out the use of focus groups as my chosen research instrument. I had based my decision on examples from other phenomenographic studies that focus groups, for example Franz et al. (2008) used what Russell (1994) described as 'synergetic' focus group discussions to collect civil engineering students' experiences of learning.

> The synergetic focus group method offers the researcher a variety of unsolicited conceptions through non-directed discussion. As lived experiences related to the phenomenon are shared by participants over an hour or so they explore qualitatively different conceptions of the phenomenon. The diversity of the conceptions form the categories of description which are the basis of phenomenographic analysis (Russell 1994:13).

1.3   Focus Groups as a Phenomenographic Research Tool

Gibbs (1997) also suggested 'focus groups are appropriate when the research involves organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic. They are particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic and insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation' (Gibbs 1997:1). Focus groups are a form of group interviewing but rely on 'interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher' (Morgan 1997:12). The key characteristic that distinguishes focus groups is the insight and data produced by the interaction between respondents often eliciting a multiplicity of views. And, according to Morgan and Kreuger (1993) they can enable a larger amount of information to be gained in a shorter period of time than using one to one interviews.

1.4   Pilot Study Sample Set

The first stage in the process of data collection for this type of inquiry is to identify the respondents, and in phenomenographic research it is particularly important the respondents selected are appropriate for the purpose of the research. As deMaris (2004) suggested, a primary consideration is they have 'knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation' (deMaris 2004:59), and as Ashworth and Lucas (2000) also advise 'the selection of participants should avoid presuppositions about the nature of the phenomenon or the nature of conceptions held by particular 'types' of individual while observing common sense precautions about maintaining 'variety' of experience' (Ashworth and Lucas 2000:300).

The pilot study focus group comprised three males and two females all aged between thirty and sixty occupying roles in training and development, learning and development, personnel and HRM. Two respondents were self employed HR consultants (Neal and Gerald); one was from the private sector (Tina) and two from the public sector (James and Nicole). All the respondents were of a senior level with years of experience ranging from five to over twenty-five. All participants received a research information sheet and signed a research consent form. A briefing sheet, which consisted of prompt questions, was tabled. There was no

formal interview schedule. With the permission of the participants the focus group was recorded. The focus group lasted for an hour and thirty minutes during which time a discussion was held on perceptions of the occupation as a profession and perceptions of being a professional.

1.5 Perceptions Emerging from the Focus Groups

1.5.1 Perception One: As a comparison

The constructs identified in the pilot study illustrated different ways of experiencing the phenomenon of P/HRM. To illustrate, the most significant point of reference and so variation was related to previous professional experience. Respondents were in agreement as to which the professions were, namely: Law, Accountancy and Medicine. P/HRM when compared with other established professions was not perceived as a profession. The respondents who had originally trained in the engineering and finance sector spoke of 'confusion' in their current roles which complicated and diluted the professional image they held of themselves and of the function – which had not been a feature of their previous professional life. Their perception was that others – by that they referred to the general public and colleagues, regarded accountants and engineers as professionals – but they did not experience the same degree of acceptance in their current roles. Their experiences and so perceptions were influenced by a direct comparison with what they had

> Well it depends on who you talk to I think. If you're talking man in the street, name a profession, they're more likely to refer to the traditional ones, lawyer, teacher, doctor whereas professionals such as HR, and obviously we consider ourselves to be professionals and part of a profession, but because I think the role has changed so much over the last fifty years, unless you have actually worked in that area or been closely involved in HR, you wouldn't necessarily see it as perhaps a profession (Neal, an engineer now working as a self employed consultant).

1.5.2 Perception Two: Education and Qualifications

In The focus group members perceived that a profession demanded formal entry-level education qualifications. P/HRM as an occupation did not 'require' entry-level education qualifications or the achievement of any formal professional qualification in order to practice, thus rendering it not a profession.

> You can get in with previous experience, even if you've actually got very limited academic qualifications, if you've actually got quite a lot of experience you can then start with your CPP, Certificate in Personnel Practice, and then move forward that way but you don't have to be a graduate, for example, there's no entry level, which obviously a lot of the professionals do have (Tina, a Trainer in the Private Sector)

1.5.3 Perception Three: State Registration

Being a profession was perceived as being registered and membership of the professional institution. Institutions and lead bodies of professions were perceived as having had the 'power' to suspend practitioners from duty should conduct fall below agreed and acceptable levels of professionalism. P/HRM was perceived as not being a profession because the professional institution lacked this power. The absence of state registration and the need for a licence to practice were perceived as evidence that the function lacked the status of a profession. The absence a process of state registration was described as a weakness on the part of the CIPD.

> Well they are moving towards being, having everybody wanting state registration the same way as the Chartered Management Institute and Management Institute are being run that way too. They've now got that chartered understanding, the same with the CIPD. So it's working that way isn't it?"(Gerald an HR Consultant).

1.5.4 Perception Four: Code of Conduct

P/HRM was perceived as unprofessional because as it lacked a recognised code of conduct which was consistently adopted and enforced by the professional institute. Possession of an enforced and respected code of conduct was constructed as a hallmark of being a profession.

There needs to be perhaps a more concerted effort to make it a profession and to get things like the code of conduct and the work of the professional association, the professional body, clearer so that people understand more what it's offering and why it's offering it. I think it's such a massive spread of activity in HR right the way through OD, through to generated activity to training development and I think it's that blurring that results from that complexity that causes us problems from the point of view of professional identity. (Nicole, HR Manager from the Public Sector).

1.5.5 Perception Five: Discrete Body of Knowledge

In this category the act of being professional was constructed as integrating concepts of understanding, operational practice and having access to a discrete body of knowledge. Personnel and Human Resource Management was not considered to possess access to a discrete knowledge base. This was described in terms of a consequence of blurred role boundaries, diverse role profiles, the lack of a need for formal qualifications on entry to the occupation or as part of a professional accreditation process were perceived as opening the doors to anyone to practice and so compromising any claims to a professional knowledge base.

> With these two professions [doctors and lawyers], there's this body of knowledge that seems to be quite firm. Legal profession based on the law and then the medical profession but in our profession it seems to be that we have to accommodate lots of different sort of facets of business and it's not clear where we are and where we're not. (James, an HR Manager in the Public Sector)

| *Construct* | Referential Aspect | Structural Aspect | |
	Meaning	Focus	Horizon
Perception One: Comparison	Comparison with accepted 'traditional' professional groups	Confusion over own roles with organization complicates and dilutes image of occupation	Limited 'visibility' of occupation restricting public understanding of occupation
Perception Two: Education and Qualifications	Required if occupation ever to be described as a profession.	Language and Description of self identity endorsed by need for formal qualifications	Absence of formal qualifications for entry devalued occupation as a profession
Perception Three: State Registration	State Registration confers professional standing to members	The Professional Body, The 'CIPD' making no such registration a requirement for members	Bounded by other occupations, in particular that of Law
Perception Four: Code of Conduct	A Code of Conduct observed and enforced confers professional security for members	The Professional Body, 'CIPD' have a code of conduct but do not enforce with consistency or accountability. Described as ineffective.	Bounded by other occupations, in particular that of the GMC.

Perception Five: Discrete Body of Knowledge	Traditionally described as a hall mark of a profession	P/HRM described as not possessing access to a distinct body of knowledge.	Bounded by other occupations, in particular that of the medicine, but recognised as shifting terrain.

1.7 Evaluation of the Focus Group as a Phenomenographic Research Tool

Having completed the pilot focus group and having had the opportunity to reflect on the process and the outcomes, I was able to recognise that in fact I had held a firm preconception of how P/HRM might be viewed by the members of the focus group. I recognised I had 'expected' them to agree that it was not a profession and had prejudged their reasons would be because it lacked a discrete body of knowledge, it required no licence to practice, the education and training routes were not prescribed, there were no formal entry requirements and there were jurisdictional boundary issues which left the occupation open to 'invasion' by others. I had the desired responses clearly mapped in my mind. I left no territory open to the respondents. I had framed both the research question and the research outcome. I had, in phenomenographic terms, pre-defined the principal perception (the outcome space) at the outset of the research and reinforced this by asking the single question of 'Is P/HRM a profession'?

Although I had deliberately and consciously adopted a naturalistic qualitative research strategy because I was fundamentally interested in learning about how respondents perceived personnel and HRM. I had deliberately sought a research method that would not constrain the respondents and after consideration I had identified pphenomenography as 'a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them' (Marton 1986:31). And, because it makes no judgments about the accuracy or truth of perceptions as they relate to phenomena I was happy the approach was appropriate and yet, by defining the initial prompt in terms of 'Is P/HRM a profession?' I was marginalizing

the very data I wished to access, I was almost forcing respondents to respond with a 'yes' or a 'no'.

As a consequence of the narrow and forced construction of the research focus the data I gathered was not rich. I struggled in my attempt to be loyal to the principles of analysis embodied within phenomenographic research. My conclusion being the data I had gathered was inappropriate for analysis guided by phenomenographic principles. I had two choices, change the approach to analysis to one less pure or change the approach to data collection. I changed my approach and adopted semi-structured interviews.

On a positive note, I learnt a lot about focus groups, how to set them up, how to mange them, about the dynamics that exists in discussion groups and about when they are an appropriate research tool and a less appropriate tool. As an academic supervisor this learning has given me confidence in my ability to give effective guidance and support to students undertaking a social science research project.

Q: So I'm going to leave it open with maybe the first question, is HR a profession, if yes - why, if no - why not?

A: Well I suppose it depends what level people are at within HR. If you say HR Management, that's a different view of it really, but if we're just talking about HR itself, certainly, I'd see quite a lot of our HR Officers who are quite well qualified and could manage quite a lot of it being used in a very administrative sense and a lot of them, well a few of them, have moved away because of that and there's still that understanding, there's too much administration there. So it depends, again, what sort of industry or public sector area you're working within.

A: Does that suggest then that it's the people rather than a function? Because you said, it depends what level they're at but that could apply to any activity?

A: I think it depends on the organisation. Its culture and the way it's traditionally worked itself through to continue putting these people, who although they come in expecting to manage and expecting to run that side of things, they are then used in a much more administrative role. So I think it's not just about the people because they are either moving away or putting up with it and allowing that to happen. So I think it's the culture of the organisation, it's so traditional and doesn't necessarily see what people's capabilities are really.

Q: If I try and pick up on that then. Let's say, for example, we were looking at a vet, by your definition of profession, if the vet was working with city animals in a sleazy veterinary practice in the back streets of Cardiff, might they not be considered a professional, as compared to a vet who was working with large animals in London Zoo?

A: No, I don't think that's the case because they're still going out and using all of their skills to put that animal right. So they still have to know everything and be a professional to

be there, whether it be sleazy or not. And what I'm saying with some of the HR officers that have voiced that opinion that they are saying that they aren't having those skills that they have accomplished to be used appropriately within the areas that they're working in now.

A: Are we talking about some sort of roles?

A: So again, it's to do with our organization really and how they're using the capabilities that they've got.

A: Misusing.

A: Yes or misusing.

A: So there's a distinction there between being a professional and being in a profession?

A: Yes.

A: Because you're talking about the skills and ability of an individual to a qualified status and whatever else.

A: Yes, they could still be a professional but unfortunately, they don't feel they're being used in a professional way.

A: That's my earlier point about using people for a structure in an organization because people can behave in a very professional way whether their background, it's only the circumstances that are changing the image but their approach to the job is, as the dictionary would define profession, a vocation, a calling or having knowledge.

A: Well yes, the dictionary might mention that but it depends on the individual and how they feel and where they feel they're being used. You're making use of their capabilities, being used appropriately.

A: Is it something to do with the range of work that HR professionals become involved in? Whereas, perhaps vets might have a slightly narrower band of exposure. Like in HR, HR Assistants through to top Personnel Directors at a senior level seems a very different role. Accountants don't seem to have quite that width of responsibility or that possible area of responsibility and I think that might be a factor. We don't seem to be able to identify slim channels of activity, do we, in HR? But I think it's a big mish-mash of overlapping blurred lines. For example, differences between Organizational development (OD) and training, for example, might cause some of our people that judge professional practice, it might cause them to think, well where are the divisions and what is OD, what is training and development, what are the related functions around it? And I think it's this blurring that causes lots of difficulty and is at the heart of where we are as a profession, which is perhaps half way to where we need to be.

Q: So by that token would you suggest that HR is a profession or are you saying that it's too big, too diverse?

A: I'm saying that because of it's size it's caused lots of problems with getting a professional identity and I think where you've got something as wide as we've got, there needs to be perhaps a more concerted effort to make it a profession and to get things like the code of conduct and the work of the professional association, the professional body, clearer so that people understand more what it's offering and why it's offering it. I think it's such a massive spread of activity in HR right the way through OD, through to generated activity to training development and I think it's that blurring that results from that complexity that causes us problems from the point of view of professional identity.

A: Yes, I'd agree with that because I've left myself out of that discussion really. I'm thinking about our HR Officers only in an HR area. I'm not even thinking about myself and I'm coming from management development sort of background, moved into OD and then tried to move away from training and coming into organizational development only. So I would agree with that because it is so blurred.

Q: Can I just stop and welcome you to the focus group and to tell you where we've got to because I think that might be a better way.....

A: Where have we got to?

A: Right, this is a sort of pilot study I think and subject to what we produce and agree and that will determine to a great extent how the main body of research is undertaken. I think today we're going to be looking at some of the questions that are being asked about suitability for using the main study. We're also today focusing on a theme, a main theme, which is presumably where the time came from and that theme is about, is HR a profession? If it's not a profession, what's missing etc. We've also, Julia went back to her sort of background for this study, she talked about what was called the Trait approach in the Sixties for identifying what professional practice was and she took us through where she's come from, if you like, and what her background is. She also said that we need to look at perhaps, are the ingredients of this Trait approach still relevant to assess a professional activity, are they still relevant or is the Sixties too far away, have things changed too much for HR? And the other main thing that she raised was this issue of, are other criteria more relevant to judge the professional line now or could we still use the old ones as a benchmark. So they're two key themes.

A: It's sort of interesting, for me personally, in terms of my background, having worked for fifteen years within XXX Bank and the professionalism of being a banker and then during that time moving through to financial services and the gradual 'want' to professionalise financial services, pensions, mortgages and insurance and the growth of the Society of

Financial Advisers and all of these things and people said, well, is it a profession? So it's a similar thing. So are you, is it a profession, do you go away and study for it for seven years and you come out as a professional or is it something that you can do within sort of a couple of night schools for six months and you're a professional?

A: I suppose a slightly different angle on that is, we might have a different starting point with our own area of involvement because we have what we already regard as a profession as a professional, if you see what I mean. And the question still remains, are we right to call it so? And if we don't, does it matter? And if we don't, do we call ourselves something else? So it's challenging status quos.

A: If I just mention Julia, my personal background was coming from fifteen years working within XXX specifically but financial services generally and my first, whatever ten years in there, was as a professional banker getting my exams in banking and then in the last five years, I shifted over to financial services. And this is like a sort of ten to fifteen years ago and over that time, over the period from fifteen years ago, financial services has gone through this, are we a profession, can we call ourselves professionals? And it started from a small knowledge base and partly that was to get credibility from the customers that I went round to serve and competing institutions. Now that was a, again, an interesting thing there with the life insurance association, which was more a, if you like, that was more the lobbying body for financial services, sort of trade association, if you like, and the Chartered Insurance Institute, which was the professional academic side. And they provided the insurance exams and they gradually muscled into life assurance and pensions and investments and grew a professional body sort of out of that. And I think a couple of years ago the two sides finally merged.

Q: Which isn't dissimilar to the IPM and ITD.

A   It might be interesting to challenge, if I may, why banking regards itself as a profession because if we can identify why other bodies consider themselves to be professions,

it might give us a clue as to why we should be or are by way of having comparatives. I'm not saying that's the only or the right answer but maybe it's a starting point.

A: I joined XXX in 81, so nearly twenty five years ago and certainly I came into that thinking that banking was a profession, that was my entry point, if you like, twenty five years ago and they had a series of examinations. I know when I started the professional exams, I had to have three relevant A Levels to actually start the banking exams and whilst I'd got three A Levels, they were the wrong ones. So my first year working for XXX was actually spent in colleges round here doing A Level Law to give me the relevant exams to start the banking exams. And they took me about five years to get my associateship of the Institute of Bankers, which became the Chartered Institute of Bankers.

A: So is it examinations that make a profession?

A: Well, that's right. And, If you like, that was the point that most people reached and then there was the likes of the fellowship that people could go on to. So I think exams where part of it, certainly for me, and the fact that it's not anyone that could just pick it up and run with it. You had a really quite defined route to becoming professionally qualified.

A: In terms of the medical profession, I think the pre-entry criteria are quite rigid aren't they for a lot of these professions whereas in HR it's, people come in on experience and work their way through.

A: So it's something to do with examinations, something to do with duration as well, coupled with experience.

A: It's the rigour of the entry process that I think differentiates professional practices primarily I think. There's a lot of emphasis on what people need to get to get through the door initially whereas we don't have that. I think that hasn't helped us to get professional status.

A: Can I play devil's advocate and just think of another example? A gas service engineer, sorry I'll start with the positive, apprenticeship, examinations, period of time, experience, so duration, everything's all very similar but not regarded as a profession. Why, where's the difference? I haven't discovered anything different yet by way of building up the description, it's the end result that seems to be different. Now is that perception, is it expectation, is it culture, I don't know, what is the difference? Is it standards, degrees of difficulty?

A: Perhaps degrees of difficulty more than standards because lots of these bodies have standards don't they? Measures of acceptable practice but I think it's the complexity that's the key, like medicine is a complex area of work to get to grips with, long training period.

A: I can give you another example, I mean there are hundreds of them. Fire fighter, similar kind of arrangement by way of periods of learning, many, many, complicated scientific examinations if they're going to succeed. Experience and duration, an organization in which you cannot just step into at a high level, you have to start from the bottom and work your way up but it's not regarded as a profession. It's a vocation, if you want to call it anything, but vocation is part of the definition of profession.

A: The bit that you said that just sparked in my mind was culture and what went through my mind was white collar, professional as an historic thing.

A: It went through my mind as well.

A: A professional is people that deal with papers and perhaps teachers and doctors and probably lots more, and other people are trade. So is it a historic thing?

A: I would say that's more of a traditional, sorry to barge in, but that's more of a traditional perception of professionals isn't it, you know, teachers, lawyers, nurses, doctors, engineers.

A: Engineers, I mean that

A: A degree as an engineer.

A: If you like that's perhaps the cross over group of being the most qualified manual people and is that a profession?

A: And there's qualified manual people as well.

A: Yes, that's true.

Q: When you said that that was a very traditional conception of professions, do you think conceptions of professions and being professional have changed?

A: Well it depends on who you talk to I think. If you're talking man in the street, name a profession, they're more likely to refer to the traditional ones, lawyer, teacher, doctor whereas professionals such as HR, and obviously we consider ourselves to be professionals and part of a profession, but because I think the role has changed so much over the last fifty years, unless you have actually worked in that area or been closely involved in HR, you wouldn't necessarily see it as perhaps a profession.

A: I think things have changed and I think things like the acting profession and professional footballers would be seen by people in the street as someone, especially if there's a lot of wealth attached to it, there's certainly a lot of credibility and kudos attached to something like that. And I think that people or many people in the street like to see success as an indicator of professional standing and I think things like professional footballers in the last ten years have become more and more successful. Now arguably, to stay at the top they have to adopt certain professional practices and they have to keep up to date and keep fit and

all these sort of things, so I think the view in the high street is a different view to what it was thirty years ago about what makes a profession.

A: And it's also understanding what they do and people know what they do, they know what teachers do. I don't think many people in the street know what a HR professional does.

A: There's a mystery there.

A: Definitely, I mean very often if I'm introduced to somebody, I'll say, I'm a HR Manager.

A: What do you do, yes.

Q: Do you think some of the image of whether HR is a profession or not is influenced by the visibility of the work?

A: Yes, it's not very visible is it a lot of the time.

Q: There's lot of programmes on the television that show what doctors do, what dentists do.

A: HR isn't very sexy though is it?

A: Not at the moment is it, it has been.

A: I can't imagine a fly on the wall, you know, ten episode series about the HR professional.

A: Discussions about disciplinary.

Q: Do you mind if I draw you back to these criteria's because one of the things that I want to do is to sort of either continue to run with them as descriptors of profession or something and try and find others. So if you had to, if you were forced into making some sort of assessment about their relevance for HRM?

A: Is the first one the distinct body of knowledge?

Q: Yes.

A: I think it's a field of knowledge isn't it? It's a spread of and overlaps with lots of other probably the professional bodies of knowledge. I don't think it's on it's own, I don't think it runs on it's own.

A: No because a lot of other types of professions, like accountancy or you know, all sorts of different businessy professions have got all of that merged into it as well haven't they? So it does sort of stretch across all functional areas. If a manger is already involved in HR sort of understanding and all that sort of thing.

A: Forty years ago managers were, at that time, I believe, not as equipped as they are now to manage all the functions and I think we spent probably twenty/thirty years helping managers to manage the HR side of management, like train the trainer and this sort of thing. So we actually spent a lot of time imparting our knowledge and skills, we've been catalysts haven't we in a way? So we're dealing with a different line managers now to what we were then and I think a lot of the judgements about professional practice were made by managers who were managing in that traditional way then, in the fifties and sixties. So we might find that some of the criteria do need to move with that, to take that into account. I think that's a key factor, this change in the role of manager and how we've helped them.

A: There's an irony in this really because taking your point about tradition, it's the word body that's attracting my attention here because it tends to suggest a collective of similarities. doctors, lawyers, teachers but when you look within those areas, there's a whole range of

differences. A doctor isn't a doctor is a doctor, that's not true because they all do different things or are specialists or are consultants or registrars or SHOs or whatever else. The same goes for lawyers and solicitors and barristers, they specialise in different areas of the business and the same for accountants, you know, they're not all the same. So it's the term body that tends to suggest by perception or by tradition that they're all one and the same. When it comes to HR, again coming back to the point you made, nobody knows what we do. So there isn't that knowledge.

A: Well they think they know what we do but very often

A: They may guess but get it wrong. There's many differences within HR, whether it's OD, learning and development, welfare, personnel, social care, whatever else, there are many differences in there but the body, such as it's defined there, is not just accepted is it in the same way as the others are.

Q: Part of the distinct body of knowledge is also referring to the training and the education part of the HR profession, do you think there's any linage looking at that as one of the classics or characteristics do you find in HR as a profession? Your points earlier about entry requirements and the rigorous entry process was quite important, any thoughts around that?

A: What sort of qualifications can people have then to move into HR, what have people done in the past apart from just CIPD? What is the route through, does anybody know about it?

A: Almost anything really because you can get in with previous experience, if you've actually got very limited academic qualifications, if you've actually got quite a lot of experience you can then start with your CPP, Certificate in Personnel Practice, and then move forward that way. You don't have to be a graduate, for example, there's entry level, which obviously how a lot of the professionals do enter.

Q: Although CIPD are trying to change that aren't they? They are still trying to bump up the level but certainly the entry.

A: A lot of people come in from the A Level too don't they? They become a training administrator and then, yes.

A: I think also with accountancy, although you've mentioned you worked through professional exams, you can actually start with quite minimal academic qualifications and slowly build up.

A: Well it's five O levels wasn't it? Maths and English included at one time I think, yes two or three years and then do your

A: Certainly, within the NHS, it's definitely more a move now towards entry level qualifications, all professions, even professions of ten years ago you could get in with just A Levels and that's good and bad. We have actually probably lost a lot of people that we might have actually gained directly from school who might have been very good practical, certainly more technicians, bio-medical science, for example.

A: I was thinking in terms of the entry requirements re: the certificate in training practice and I can't think what they are. So again, that is sort of a distinction between the two main bodies.

Q: And from CTP you can go on to do the professional development scheme and the equivalent would be CPP and the same entry requirements for that, from that you can go and do. So the entry requirements are mixed . What about state registration? If you look at the traditional characteristics of being a professional, state registration is considered to be important, is that the criteria that's relevant to HR as a profession?

A: What exactly is it, a state registration?

Q: It means you need a licence to practice. So if you're a doctor, you can't go and operate on somebody unless you are registered with BMA. If you're an accountant, if you're a chartered accountant, you need to be registered as a chartered accountant.

A: In order you need to have actually achieved certain levels of qualifications.

Q: Yes, so state registration means that you have demonstrated that you have reached a certain level and that you are registered with a professional body. Now in the industry of HR, we don't have state registration, we don't need a licence to practice. Traditionally, that's been seen as a criterion against which a profession has been judged a profession or not and my purpose for this evening is to say, well are these criterion relevant? If yes, fine. If no, what other ones are? So state registration is by looking at these criteria, HR would fail to be considered a profession because it doesn't require state registration. That doesn't mean to say we are concluding this evening that HR is not a profession but it means that we are using different criterion against which we are judging it as a profession and my objective is to find, well what are those criterion that we're using? And articulating what they are is the challenge because we sort of have feelings about what we think it means to be considering HR as a profession but actually articulating those quite clearly is challenging.

A: Well they are moving towards being, having everybody needing state registration the same way as the Chartered Management Institute and Management Institute are being run that way too. They've now got that chartered understanding, the same with the CIPD. So it's working that way isn't it?

A: But that's only for membership or only for members in membership. It doesn't stop you working within HR but without qualifications, that's the point about state registration.

A: But I think it will do, by the time you've sort of gone through them, that's when people will then have to have that.

A: Well I think the argument really ought to be or should be, ought there to be state registration? If that's the judgement by which you become professional because if there ought to be, is this a lobbying group for getting state registration so we can practice our skills?

Q: I mean there is an argument saying, the profession will not be considered a profession by others until there is state registration. CIPD's argument will probably be, I don't know, probably be, we can't enforce state registration because 47% of our members would then be lost.

A: And they perhaps perform important functions within the industry.

A: There's a counter argument of that though isn't there? And that is, if it were introduced over a period of time, they're likely to increase the number of membership.

Q: Yes, which is the next point I'll make, with the direction of chartered status and this drive to ensure that employers advertise, not just for a CIPD member, but for a Chartered CIPD member. So maybe state registration has the traditional, you are registered with a body, a governing body, is not an appropriate criteria but the philosophy of having registration and control by a professional body is one that CIPD are acknowledging as important and are actually bringing phase strategies to achieve that, gradually and long term.

A: What about entry levels or licence levels? So there were three levels that were appropriate, very junior ones or a training administrator, PA or two, personnel director and the person therefore, wouldn't be pushed out the profession if they didn't have anything until they could sort of get the basic junior one, which is a BPS, equivalent to a BPS basic licence but if people wanted to progress to sort of HR manager, the middle of that, then level 2 licence.

Q: They seem to have got that haven't they with the associate grade of member graduate chartered fellow? So they have sort of got that.

A: What I would like to say on that one is that perhaps, does the rest of the world understand what these things mean? And if there were three levels, then there's clearly one, two and three in a profession, then it might be easy for those outside who judge us as a profession primarily to understand where we are. I think that's really important, things like associate and all the rest of it.

A: This is maybe a political observation but I'm sure we have various differentiations in title, acknowledgement within CIPD because there are many more than you've just identified in order to capture membership. You might say that's a bit worrying because if you keep altering the height of the bar, you want to be able to get people over or under.

Q: Is that actually significant in a different way, is there a tension there between the CIPD as a profit making institution who wants as many members as it can get irrespective of a level of the title and how many bend backwards they have to make to accommodate them and a notion of a professional body that is, you know, it's not a profit making institution, it's concerned with upholding standards and codes of conduct? Is there a tension there that is then confusing whether or not HR is a profession because the one body actually has different objectives?

A: Yes.

A: Yes and neutrality is a key issue I think when you're looking at professional identity. I think an example of this would be some of the challenges that are made for some of the courses that are provided by the CIPD. I think they are actually, they discourage a lot of potential members from going on them because of the prices. But if a body was a bit more neutral and seen to be more neutral it would do us good as a profession.

A: It would be interesting to know what their reaction would be if you called them a profit making organization because they are a registered charity and therefore, not a profit

A: Yes, an interesting point.

A: It's an issue that, this is the core of the question...

A: Something again, as an analogy from my past, with financial services, it's registration under the financial services authority as the independent body. People have to pass the exams and they may choose to join the CII, Chartered Insurance Institute, or they may not but they have to get exams and be authorised by the financial services authority. So that again is an idea.

Q: Sorry, run that past me again. So are you saying there's an examination body that's separate from the professional body and people need the exams but they don't need to join the professional body?

A: Yes.

Q: So is one of the issues in professional identification of HR as a profession complicated by the fact that it's the same professional body that endorses the qualifications as the awarding body?

A: I think it is yes, self-interest.

A: It's not an aid, I think it's a disadvantage.

A: Which allows them to adjust it up and down.

A: The view to me, definitely neutrality is important.

A: How do lawyers work in local society, there is the law society isn't there? Their exams could be taken at any particular institution?

A: I'm not sure.

A: There are many providers of legal training but the examinations are controlled by a central body.

A: So with doctors, you've got to be registered with the General Medical Council, that you take exams for the. So again it's controlled.

A: With these two professions, there's this body of knowledge that seems to be quite firm. Legal profession based on the law and then the medical profession but in our profession it seems to be that we have to accommodate lots of different sort of facets of business and it's not clear where we are and where we're not.

A: Or code of practice working within the law.

Q: We'll come to code of practice/code of ethics in a second but just to develop that point, there are people who have done research around this, do we have a discrete body of knowledge? And some of the writers suggest that we are giving away our skills base, people like that say we are giving away our knowledge, we are devolving our responsibilities to the line, consequently, HR is losing it's professional grasp on a certain discrete body of knowledge and thereby, giving it away it's losing professional standing but the contrary position is, actually no, we are enhancing our status as a profession because we are developing new skills. We are broadening our knowledge base, we are working in areas that previously we haven't worked. The blurring of the boundaries is actually helping us achieve professional credibility within the organization. We're looking more to becoming business partners and financial equals and you can't do that if you hold on to your traditional preserves

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and so the idea is that the traditional conceptions of what HR did are not relevant to today's work as a professional HR practitioner in a rapidly changing organization. If we take that one stage further, there is then other work that's being done at the moment by people like Compton and Julia Evetts, whose research is leading them to suggest that the role and function of the professional body is becoming increasingly marginalized because the role and responsibilities of the HR practitioners are increasingly being determined by the organization in which they work for and not the professional body and the skills and competence that they need is being determined by the organization that they work for and not the syllabus of the CIPD. And so there's this idea that's put forward that's called the organization profession, which means that these sort of criteria, registered professional body, state registration, discrete body of knowledge, are not relevant to constructions of profession and professionalism in today's world. How does that fit in with what you were thinking? It also links into your very earlier point about culture and organization.

A: Can I say something first then because a lot of organizations are being encouraged in setting their own competency frameworks and the skills that they want to develop their own values and that sort of thing do make a big difference. It does take it away from sometimes that body of skills that's required for your qualifications but is it right back down, probably that isn't quite the way to say, you know, quite a way from what is essentially required, gives them a lot more status and that sort of thing coming through within these competency values. So you've got a lot more of that side of it rather than the technical understanding and what HR was for the qualifications that people did then.

A: I think the latter comment that you made about the organization having an influence would be very true, for example, in my organization, which is city council or any local authority because every employee has a job description whether you're a barrister or an accountant, whatever your profession happens to be, sorry it tripped off the tongue then, whatever your discipline is and a move, just thinking through what's going to happen over the next twelve to eighteen months and that is the application of the competency framework to every employee. Well, hang about, if you're a professional and you've earned your corn doing that for x

number of years or if not, you've only just qualified for that matter, what right does someone else have to say, are you competent, do you meet our competence requirements when you've been judged by an external awarded body to say that you are. I know that's a slight digression but I think it actually reinforces the point about organizational influence.

A: But that's probably because that sort of organization isn't seen to have a lot of qualifications within what they're doing and they need other ways of bringing practicing skills and knowledge to that type of workforce, that's why they started with all this competency framework business isn't it? Because it was seen across the whole of Britain really to be lacking in certain qualifications, so let's give different ways.

Q: So if we allow organizations to determine the criteria against which HR practitioners operate, if we almost as a collective group abdicate responsibility for defining our own standards of operation, are we not leaving ourselves hostage to fortune? Are we not saying, well the chances of us ever being considered a profession are going to become so diluted because what you do in XXX City Council and what XXX do, what you do in NHS, are going to be so different that the concept of having a clear understanding of what HR is as a profession will become even more difficult and we're already suggesting I think that lack of visibility, lack of entry rigour is compromising our status.

A: You've only got to look through a series of job advertisements to recognise that feature based on requirement and reward.

Q: Recognise what feature, the influence of the organization?

A: The influence of the organization and the disparate nature of interpretation of a job title. HR Manager there is not certainly the same as a HR Manager there. This one gets 60K a year, this one get 25k a year.

A: And also there are still quite a few companies, take the private sector, that aren't requiring CIPD as essential, it's desirable in a lot of cases. Whereas, really, the level of post holder it's got to be essential and I think that really comes down to the perception of the qualification or perhaps the role within that organization.

A: I think organizations will always determine the agenda and they will interpret the standards to something that's meaningful in the context of the organization but I don't think that stops us, as a professional body, from having a platform of areas of acceptable performance. And OK, we could devote the wording of criteria depends on something but I think the principle is, that if there is a platform then anyone that goes into an organization can then agree how that platform will be adapted and used in the organization. So I think there can be two sets of standards and they shouldn't differ very much but they could differ according to the market place according to the culture.

Q: So that brings us neatly on then to the last point about what criteria of being professional, could that platform then be a code of conduct or the code of professional ethics?

A: It could be built in to that couldn't it? If there was a section of standards, which is devoted to professional behaviour or ethics or whatever, then that would describe sort of do's and don'ts that generally should be adhered to, obviously, it would depend on the situation but that could be a part of the code.

Q: And how important is the idea of a code of conduct? Because CIPD do have a code of conduct, how important is that as a criteria in defining professional and professionalism today?

A: It depends how it's used. If you have a code of conduct, you're measuring people, potentially they've reached that then there's consequences.

Q: There are no consequences

A: There's more sort of standards to be achieved then?

Q: It's behaviour isn't it?

A: Then you come back to the point of organizational influence because you have to question the value of the code of conduct because if we are employed in an organization as a HR professional/specialist, call it what you will, and we worked to a code of conduct, which I'm sure most of us would agree to all of the principles behind those codes of conduct because it says what we are, we are professionals, but then the organization comes along and says, actually I want you to do this, excuse me, that's against my code of conduct. Do you want a job? What are we going to do?

A: It really does happen everywhere.

A: Yes, it's important to have guidelines isn't it for professional activity.

A: I suppose the only consolation is, we know we're going wrong and we can look to the organizations demand. We know that it's not right and it goes against the grain but I suspect we'd probably still do it providing it's not illegal.

A: I guess if we were a lot of professions and we were asked to do something that breached our code of conduct, we'd probably go to that particular body that enforces that to support or to

Q: But aren't we, as HR professionals, clear enough about what's in our code of conduct?

A: No, definitely not.

A: Definitely not.

Q: Would we know that we were being asked to breach it in any way? So maybe this is all part of your point about visibility and transparency and awareness of what the CIPD is that makes it less professional.

A: That's why you have your institutions there really isn't it, so you can network. So if you feel a bit uncomfortable you can then contact them and say, has anybody else had this sort of problem? Have you got any sort of articles written on this?

Q: But I suspect that's only going to be achieved if people have the confidence to say, we are a profession and we are being asked to do something that we consider unprofessional. For as long as we are ambivalent about whether or not we are a professional, as long as we are ambiguous about whether or not we are professionals, on what platform do you go and say, actually I think I'm being asked to do something that compromises my professional conduct because this is only a code of conduct, it's not enforced in anyway.

A: And also the impact, you know, if you're being asked to do something that you think is inappropriate in line with the code of conduct, what's the end result? I mean if it was a doctor being asked to do something, potentially peoples lives could be affected, generally that's not going to be the case with some of our issues. It might just be that the company is making decisions, which you feel are not in line with good practice or in line with equal opportunities. OK, it's against civil law.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

Q: It's not going to cause the company to go into bankruptcy or liquidation, whereas an accountant or a finance director might be.

A: I suppose, potentially, that really a professional decision was made then the resulting publicity could be very damaging for the organization.

A: If they're not guided appropriately you could finish up with some pretty hefty fines that could put you into bankruptcy.

A: We also, as a training company, are often asked for professional indemnity.

A: That's interesting, professional indemnity, I suppose we are a profession then.

Q: Can I do two other things, can I draw your attention to the points 8 and 9 and 11 and the second thing I ask you to do is to, at the end of the evening, identify for you, one question that you would want the answer to in order to be able to make a judgement about whether HR is a profession or not. So I just ask you to give some consideration to points 8, 9 and 11.

A: Although we are responding to the needs of our individual organizations you're still going to be common to all HR that would apply whatever organization you are. There's still going to be some core areas that would remain the same. Perhaps the direction is different but the focus might be different depending on the organization, I suppose its private sector or public sector of the professional influence the direction in which you go in. Yes, I think perhaps it just focuses our priorities to enhance the organization but I think you'd find a lot of different themes.

Q: Remaining?

A: Yes.

Q: Any other sorts, what about 11 then?

A: I think it will grow because of what we're now doing in HR and all of those sorts of things, so it will become that you have to be a chartered individual to do certain jobs. So it's got to be your responsibility. I also think there needs to be more awareness raising at careers level, you know, in terms of promoting it as a profession, not necessarily just at university but even before that because I don't think I even knew about HR or personnel, as it was then, when I was at school because unless you knew someone who worked in that area, you know, you knew a teacher, you'd know an accountant or a doctor but you wouldn't necessarily know what HR was.

Q: Which again goes back to the visibility.

A: I think as well, if we keep reinventing ourselves and we keep having as many flavours of the month in HR as we do, then in years to come it will be diluted. I think an example of that would be training and development being less popular now than it was ten years ago and the learning culture sort of taking over from training development. People being encouraged to learn at their own skills rather than having any sort of organizational requirements imposed through training. So I think that sort of change has been pretty major. I think that's had a big impact on the way professionals are seen and I think since the industrial training acts were disbanded, I think there's been a reduction in the status of the training professional. So I think that's happened in the last fifteen years mainly, I've noticed that.

A: I think HR has also been affected by the negative sort of publicity in terms of companies having very strong diversity and quality policies, which are a good thing but a negative impact they can perhaps have or could be perceived as by perhaps the people who work in the organization, particularly if they don't understand necessarily why they're introduced. It's an easy target isn't it if people don't like, you can't talk about Christmas in a school, you know, that sort of bending back to equality and diversity, OK that's a HR thing isn't it, right.

Q: Any other thoughts on that one?

A: I think if we're to grow as a profession, and I do believe we are a profession, I think we need to brand more clearly the sort of labels we have, things like emotional intelligence, if you like, we need to brand it in a way, which helps us to increase the understanding of our clients. And I think out there at the moment, we struggle as a profession with our own jargon and I think we struggle more with it than the legal profession, the accountancy profession, because I think it's sort of shades of grey as to what it is and what it isn't and not just emotional intelligence, lots of other things too. And I think it's understanding that's important outside of our profession in order to get us credibility. I don't think it's just us that judges it as a profession, I think we're just a bit of it.

A: It seems clear from what we've established so far that something has to change in order for us to be acknowledged as a profession publicly.

Q: So do we all think we're a profession?

A: Yes.

A: I would like to think so.

A: I would like to think so. The reason I make that observation is in answer to question 11, is it growing in prestige? I would say CIPD is growing in prestige, which should infer that we too are growing in prestige but unfortunately, I think it takes us back to question 8, which is, are organizations gatekeepers of our knowledge, which I think they are because although there's a requirement in order to maintain membership of CPD, an organization can still control, to some degree, the amount of knowledge you have and experience and exposure you get in order to maintain your CPD because it's not an absolute requirement as if you were a surveyor or a solicitor, where x number of hours needs to be put in every year. We're back to the awarding qualification again, the recognition.

Q: So two things then to wrap this up, are those criterion relevant to HR as a profession in the year 2006?

A: Yes to varying levels and I think, do they apply?

Q: Yes, do they apply?

A: Is another matter. They don't currently apply do they because you don't need state registration.

A: Would it be useful though?

A: That's not the same question with respect is it?

Q: No it isn't, you're right. Maybe that's the issue, maybe there is, because part of this is the pilot study for the research. So it's not trying to answer all the questions, it's trying to say, what do I need to be asking to get the right questions and I think what I'm finding tonight is asking that question is not the right question because the answer is, yes they apply in different degrees or no, they're not relevant. So the value in terms of the research, the subsequent research, is that this pilot focus group has identified that those questions are actually not relevant to trying to determine what HR is. So my second point then, that's helpful, if my research is about, is HR a profession, for each of you, what would be the key point that you would want to explore? Just to say that again, what I've learnt so far is that by asking those questions, are these criteria relevant, I'm not going to get the answer I need because of your point, are they relevant or are they appropriate is not the same thing. So I've learnt that asking those questions is not going to give me the answer, is HR a profession or not going to give me the answer to the question is HR a profession. So if my question remains the same, is HR a profession, what one issue would you want this research to explore, what for you would be?

A: The role and status of the professional body would be my main one.

A: The CIPD.

A: I think mine would be determining a level of education and qualification to expect to be achieved to recognise the profession.

A: And I'll take it one step further separating out the ability to award those qualifications from the professional body itself.

A: Yes, mines on those lines about the qualifications one needs to tie it in to what organizations .

Q: So yours has got something to do with what are organizations?

A: Well it's exactly what Eric was saying around organizations really game keeping those skills. So it is important to understand what level of qualification one needs or route through to acquire that definite understanding of what we need to continue to practice within the organization rather than just be sucked in just to what they want at that level at that period of time, you know, for the next two years. That's not really good enough, they need to be sort of showing and using a lot more of what the qualifications are about.

A: If you're a HR consultant and therefore, working for yourself, would there be any differences there because we're saying that organizations are gatekeepers, how would that work if you were contracted to an organization just for a specific piece of work, you'd be selling your particular skills and potentially the fact that you're a professional.

A: They still have the right to reject your ideas. They can still say, no we're not going to do that or it's too risky or it's too expensive.

A: Yes, they could say that's part of the skill of the consultant to sell the concept but I think the organization would be switched on, would still be thinking it knows where it wants to be providing it doesn't contradict the law of the lands.

A: My thoughts would be around, what is the public perception of a profession.

Q: Of a profession or of HR as a profession?

A: Of a profession. I'm just thinking, if I ask my wife if I'm a professional, I just wonder what she'd say and that's perhaps around, yes public perception branding to some extent.

A: And also perhaps individuals experience of HR professionals, whether it's been a good or bad experience.

A: We all read People Management and my views over the last ten years have been coloured because that's what I read but I wonder if I was outside, if I was still working in a bank, what my view would be looking in, you know, we're all within it.

Q: So, if I'm understanding you right, what you're suggesting is that in order for me to have any validity in the answer, I need to be asking lay people what they think HR, as well as asking HR?

A: Compare perhaps professional views with lay people to see whether they're the same.

A: I've got a rather flippant answer for you, call ourselves HR accountants.

Q: Well it's quite, because I think I am so enmeshed in all of this, I now find myself writing HR practitioners and sort of avoiding this implicit use of HR as a profession, I now find HR practitioner, the HR occupation, it's quite interesting.

A: Personnel engineer.

Q: Well yes, Human Resource engineer, a human engineer.

A: The move away from personnel manager that is sounding old now isn't it?

A: I think another area is this clarity about the roles that there are and what they do, what the boundaries are, the overlaps and what the core of each role is really all about, of all the HR activities. There's not the level of understanding amongst line managers, for example, that I think there needs to be. You hear terms like OD but they're not too sure where it stops and starts.

A: I'm not sure I necessarily agree with

A: I think you're right.

Q: And we talk about employee relations, industrial relations and we've still got a whole history there, it's all sort of enmeshed with personnel. Is there anything that you would have expected me to want you to talk about this evening under the title, is HR a profession, that we haven't talked about, have I got any huge gaps?

A: Salary

Q   I hadn't thought but yes, thank you.

A: I mentioned the levels when we first came in, levels of staff and whether that was required as a profession, so a similar sort of thing, yes.

A: So we're thinking in terms of those common professions, doctors, accountants, lawyers, their salary levels are really quite high.

Q: Maybe that's also linked in with your perception of the general publics perception of HR, if they think you're earning 80 or 90,000 but as a profession, if they think you are earning 12 or 15,000, maybe not.

A: Maybe.....

Q; I think we might be close to the end of our time together. Before we close, is there anything more you would like to say. Anything you have not had chance to express that you feel is important....?

A: No thanks...no, I think I have said it all....

A: No, covered most of it I think....

A: No, nothing - thank you....

Q: Anything else....?

Q: Okay, if there is nothing else, may I thank you for your time and your contributions....

Thank you.

Appendix Three: The Interview Schedule

A Phenomenographic Inquiry into Personnel/Human Resource Management Practitioners Experiences of Being Professional

Background

- Can you give me a brief résumé of how you became part of the HRM function
- Briefly describe your current organization and your role within it.
- Has your HRM role changed over the years?
- What have been the key influencing factors and/or Stakeholders in the drivers for change process?

Being Professional

- How would you define a profession, can you give me some examples and tell me why you perceive them as professions?
- What is your perception of being professional?
- Who assesses your professionalism in the context of HRM?
- How far do you perceive Personnel/Human Resource Management to be a profession?
- In your perception what would need to change to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Organizational Perspective

- How far does the organization for which you work influence the status of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?
- In your opinion what would need to change within the context of the organization to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

- How far does the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development influence the status of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?
- In your perception what would need to change within the context of the lead body to further raise the profile of Personnel/Human Resource Management as a profession?

Other

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me

A Phenomenographic Study of Perceptions of profession and of Being a professional in the context of Personnel/Human Resource Management Practitioners

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project focusing on your experiences of being Professional. The research will be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education through the Open University. The degree is supervised internally by Dr Hillary Burgess, Director for Postgraduate Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

What is the purpose of the research study?

The research study is concerned to identify factors which serve to influence the professional identity of personnel and Human Resource practitioners. Key themes from the literature suggest of the individual experiences of the phenomenon 'professional' vary; this research seeks to determine the extent to which there is similarity and variation. It suggests the role and function of the employing organization is significant in shaping professional constructs and that this is changing as the role of the personnel HR practitioner evolves, this study aims to trace the experiences of individual in this respect. It also seeks to determine the extent to which previous professional engagement affects being professional and finally to ascertain the influence of the professional body, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). The aim of this study is to explore the extent to which the established themes are experienced by professional members and further, to seek to identify new concerns or changes in role and role enactment.

What is the background to the study?

This research will establish a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the role, task and professional issues facing the existing workforce. It will therefore enable any proposed changes in education and training, professional roles or work arrangements to be more effective in meeting the needs of the individual and the profession. As a Chartered Member of the profession your experiences may help shape the service of the future.

Why is this research important?

The changing role of Personnel/HR within many organizations establishes the boarder context within which this research can be located, specific support for the relevance and timeliness of a project concerned with extending our understanding of professional roles and role enactment in is provided through the work being undertaken by the CIPD. It is anticipated the findings of this research study will contribute to this work by enhancing current understanding of role and role identity of the professionals and so to ensuring that any changes are as effective as possible. Your contribution to this will be invaluable.

Where is the research located?

Up to fifteen respondents in the Midlands area of England in the UK are being invited to volunteer to participate in the study. Seeking volunteer respondents will allow for a cross section of members to be determined representing seniority, age, gender and length of service.

What will be involved if I decide to take part?

I am asking you to agree to be interviewed, in confidence. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be arranged at a time and place to suit you. You will be asked to give your consent in writing before the start of the interview. With your permission the interview will be recorded and written up in full following the interview. The transcription will be undertaken by someone other than me. The transcriber will be made aware of the ethical issues as well as those of confidentially. The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet to which only I have access. At the conclusion of the research the tapes will be offered back to you for safe keeping. If for any reason you do not wish for the interview to be recorded you may decline. You may be asked if you are happy with written notes to be taken during the interview as an alternative.

A coding system will ensure respondent anonymity is maintained at all times.

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Analysis will be a staged and iterative process. An initial sift of the interview transcripts will enable identification of new themes along side a comparison against those previously identified from the literature. This will allow the identification of what is termed 'outcome space'.

How much time will be involved?

You will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher which could take up to one hour. Following the interview you may be contact for clarification of some aspects of the tape, should for example audibility may be poor. You may then be invited to discuss in detail a specific aspect of the contribution you made; this may again take up to one hour.

Will my contribution be anonymous?

Yes, your participation in the research study will be confidential. No specific comments will be attributed to any single contributor. The contribution you make will form part of the overall findings, in this respect it may be possible to identify themes which reflect distinct professions and/or organizations but individual respondents will remain anonymous.

Will my contribution be anonymous?

The findings from the research study will be written up to form the thesis for the degree programme being studied by the researcher. It is possible that some of the findings from the study may also form some or all of an academic paper or other similar article for publication or more general dissemination. Copies of any articles will be made available to participants, on request, free of charge.

What if I want to change my mind and withdraw?

You are able to withdraw from the research at any stage and without question. Please make contact directly or leave a message simply saying you wish to withdraw. This is perfectly acceptable. No questions will be asked or explanation sought.

What if I have other issues?

The researcher is Julia Pointon, an individual EdD student. Please contact her directly if this is appropriate (0116 250 6154 or email: jpointon@dmu.ac.uk). If your concern is best dealt with by another person you are invited to contact Dr Burgess at the Open University 01908 6555888 or email: h.m.m.burgess@open.ac.uk)

Appendix Five: The Research Respondent Consent Form

A Phenomenographic Study of Perceptions of profession and of Being a professional in the context of Personnel/Human Resource Management Practitioners

I agree to participate in the research study to be undertaken by Julia Pointon in partial fulfilment of the degree of doctor of Education through the Open University. I have read the Research Participant Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to consider the implications of agreeing to participate in the research study. I am aware I have access to Julia or her supervisor via the Postgraduate Studies Centre, The Open University, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, Telephone 01908 653789, should I require any additional information.

I am aware that I will be asked to be interviewed, that the interview with my permission will be recorded and maybe transcribed by a third person who has been briefed on ethical issues and the issue of confidentiality. The transcripts will be seen by the researcher and other members of the supervisory and examining research team. I am aware the information I offer will form part of the results of the study which may be published or used as part of a research dissemination activity.

I am aware my participation is voluntary I can withdraw from the research study at any point and no questions will be asked concerning my decision.

Signature of Voluntary Research Participant_____

Name in block letters _____

Date _____

I confirm that the terms of the research study as detailed in the written participant information sheet have been provided and explained and to the best of my judgement have been understood by the above named voluntary participant.

Signature of Researcher_____

Name in block letters _____

Date _____

Appendix Six: Research Respondent Profile for the Main Study

Name	Title	Public	Private	Self Employed	Male	Female
1. Eric	Training Officer	Yes			Yes	
2. Ray	Consultant			Yes	Yes	
3. Gill	HR Manager		Yes			Yes
4. Judith	HR Manager	Yes				Yes
5. Wayne	HRM Director	Yes			Yes	
6. Sally	Personnel Manager		Yes			Yes
7. Katie	Training Manager		Yes			Yes
8. Karen	Business Partner		Yes			Yes
9. Jackie	HRM Lecturer	Yes				Yes
10. Mary	HRM Lecturer	Yes				Yes
11. Nigel	HR Director		Yes		Yes	
12. Linda	HRM Lecturer	Yes				Yes
13. Chris	Diversity Manager	Yes			Yes	
14. Jane	HR Director		Yes			Yes
15. David	Business Partner		Yes		Yes	
16. Martin	Head of HRM		Yes		Yes	
17. Rosie	HR Director		Yes			Yes
18. Janice	Business Partner		Yes			Yes
19. Amanda*	HR Manager		Yes			Yes
20. Ian*	HR Manager		Yes			Yes
21. Robin	HR Consultant			Yes	Yes	
22. Fiona	HR Director	Yes				Yes

* Informed during the interview they were not CIPD qualified

Appendix Seven: Résumé of Main Study Research Respondents

1) Eric   Training Officer

Previously working in private industry as a training adviser, for the past ten years Eric has been the Training Officer for a large City Council. He has responsibility for the identification of training needs and the provision of appropriate solutions for over 800 staff in a range of HR functions. The role is focused on the achievement of objectives as defined by the City Council. His role operates at the level of implementation rather than policy development.

2) Ray   HR Consultant

Having successfully gained maths and sciences at 'A' level, Ray, qualified as an engineer and completed his Masters qualification at Edinburgh University in economics. After working for Forante and the defence service, he was head hunted to become the lead of pay and benefits for British National Oil Corporation. As he described it "in the good days" the company had an annual turnover in excess of 3 .4 billion with an HR budget of 68 million. However, in 1986 following a major oil price crash Ray was made redundant. It was at this point he decided to establish his own consultancy which he has run for the past 21 years in partnership with his wife a qualified psychotherapist. His client list includes major 'Blue Chip companies, his work is at the level of policy and strategy rather than operational detail.

3) Gill   HR Manager

HR Manager in company manufacturing hygienic work wear and disinfectant wipes employing nearly 80 staff. Current her role is HR manager, although when Gill joined the organisation nine years ago, she joined as PA to the Chairman. In that role she had responsibility for personnel administration duties. Gill achieved her postgraduate diploma in personnel management through part-time route of study. Her role encompasses all aspects of HR administration and day to day compliance issues. She is supported by one other member of staff.

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4) **Judith   HR Manager**

Since 1987 Judith has been employed as an HR Manager in a large Research Led University. Employed initially as a personnel officer in a department of five the HR Department now comprises 22 members supporting a University staff of over 1,200. Graduating with an honours degree in English, Judith achieved CIPD. Qualification via part time study and now works two and a half days a week. She is also a full time and very 'hands on' mum. She describes her role as having "undergone a massive transformation" becoming increasingly specialised in the area of Equality and Diversity to the point she feels "out of touch" with general HR issues. The tight focus has been at the behest of the organization as it strives to comply with legislative requirements and demonstrate a best practice approach to inclusivity.

5) **Wayne   HRM Director**

Wayne works as a group project manager implementing the electronic staff record system across 11 National Health Service organisations. Graduating with a degree in politics, he describes himself as 'happening upon' a career in HR by accident whilst looking for a job in management with Rolls Royce. For the past 15 years he has been an HR Director, whose primary function has been to effectively steer an essentially bureaucratic organisation through changes in national policy, which directly affect human resources. He has ultimate responsibility for the implementation of policies and systems, for example the recent introduction of a revised compensation and benefits policy across multiple NHS trusts. The scope of his role includes advising on policy development at national level. Since completing the research interviews Wayne has become a self-employed Consultant operating in the same field of practice (Jan 2008).

6) **Sally   Personnel Manager**

After completing an Arts degree, Sally joined a graduate trainee scheme in local government until she took a career break for seven years to start her family returning to work under the 'New Opportunities for Women' (NOW) scheme. Although not her intended area of work after "thirty fixed term contracts" in the mid 1990s Sally eventually secured a permanent position within the personnel department of government organisation. In 2000 the department

changed its name to the Department of Human Resource Management in order "to be seen as more part of the business at the top level of the organization". However, Sally believes "for a variety of reasons it failed to deliver on that level of input". She describes her work in Pensions and with trade Unions as "very heavily driven by legislation"

7)   Katie   Training Manager

Katie, who works for a multi national company with offices across the world, describes herself as having fallen into a career in human resource management, her previous career as an instructor with the British Horse Society, provided her with the diversity and people contact she sought in a career. Following a major back injury, she had to seek alternative employment, but wished to continue to develop and use her natural coaching and people orientated skills. For the past 17 years she has worked in training and development, and now holds a senior training role for Europe. Reporting directly to the head of Learning and Development she is responsible for the company that has grown employees to a current headcount of 3500. Although currently working towards her Masters in HRM Katie completed her CIPD qualification by part-time study.

8)   Karen   Business Partner

Karen completed her degree in English and Sociology in Scotland while working part-time in retail and volunteering for the Citizen's Advice Bureau. It was through her voluntary work that she became interested in employment law. She then completed her Masters in Personnel Management before taking up a temporary position in the NHS Acute Trust in Lanarkshire as a Personnel Assistant. She moved from there to take up a post with in a major MOD organisation and secured a series of promoted positions: Personnel Assistant, HR Adviser, HR Officer, HR Manager to HR Shared Services Manager. She was most recently promoted to HR Business Partner (BP) with responsibility for 1500 of which 80% are engineers and 20% office staff. She considers her biggest challenge is to get HR to adapt to and meet the needs of the business world in which it operates, remarking that all too frequently it remains detached and isolated and "we confuse ourselves sometimes". Karen explained; "while we are concerned to promote the function as a BP we still need to get the basics right first. it's

what you do for the majority of the time – that is largely the shop window for HR". In her current role as BP she sates: "the two biggest parts are about influencing senior managers and coaching them".

9)   Jackie   HRM Lecturer

Immediately following completion of her first degree Jackie joined the British Army as an education officer. When she left the military after 20 plus years service she undertook CIPD accredited Masters Degree in Training and Development and joined the Institute of Training and Development. For the past 11 years Jackie has been responsible for the curriculum planning and development of the CIPD accredited programmes at a major University in the North of the country. Jackie describes her years in the forces as focussing on the internal needs and dynamics of the organization: "that concentration on the internal is necessary, too much external influence[s] and you'll loose some of the cohesiveness that makes the Military, Military". In contrast, Jackie describes her role at the University as requiring an external focus "here on the other hand we do have so much contact with the outside, that's quite different. We're constantly looking at it to see how to respond to those things".

10)   Mary   HRM Lecturer

Mary's original career ambition was to become a teacher but a series of personal events forced to review her career aim. At the age of 21 she graduated with the CIPD qualification and undertook a series of administrative roles before taking up her current position with a centre for professional development. Her work is with organisations seeking to maximise the contribution of their human resources to organisational success.

11)   Nigel   HR Director

Nigel qualified in mechanical Engineering and won the Queens award to industry before making a conscious decision to change career direction completely. Remaining with the same organisation 'Rank Taylor Hobson', Nigel persuaded the Chairman to fund his degree in personnel management. That was in the early 1990s. Nigel remained with the company for a further 15 years when he decided to take up a freelance consultancy position as an HR

director with a multinational company in the South of the Country. He has been working with them as an HR Director for the past 12 months. The move to his current role was motivated be his need to "unpick my brains a little bit. I am doing it part time for them just to recharge the batteries". While his current role affords considerable latitude in terms of how he prioritises his work load, it is driven inexorably by legislation "if you just take the legalistic side of it, it changes at such a rate that if you don't keep up to date you won't be able to do your job, it's as simple as that". Nigel regards HR as needing to be an "engaged profession, it has to be engaged in the business". In this he is referring to the need to retain a broad spectrum of understanding, "if HR does become specialised and siloed, how can it possibly claim to have a strategic seat because strategy looks at the whole battlefield not just the infantry"

12) Linda   HRM Lecturer

Linda's career started at the age of 17 as a student nurse, a job she did for nine months, but found she was too young to cope with "being around dead bodies". Her next appointment was with 'British Home Stores' then later joined 'John Smith's', where she remained for a number of years until she met her husband and started a family. At the age of 39 when her daughter was five Linda was appointed to the position of use training scheme coordinator. At the age of 45, Linda completed her degree in 'Education' and achieved her CIPD qualification. For the past 14 years, Linda has taught HR in a college of further education. Her role is defined by the curriculum which is determined by the CIPD. Her role within the organization does not enable her to influence curriculum planning or delivery. She expresses her frustrations with the CIPD and the current curriculum saying" ...they want a profession and to make a difference,... so I think they need to change, I don't think its all about qualifications, it's about all the things we do in the profession to better people's lives....but how much influence you can have in organizations ..I don't know"

13) Chris   Diversity and Equality Manager

Chris qualified as an HR professional in 1998 and has worked in a variety of Private and Public sector organisations as a personnel manager and more recently as HR Manager. His current position is as a specialist adviser in diversity and equality.

Since 2004 he has been a moderator and external examiner for a range of CIPD professional programmes of study. He is an active member of his local CIPD branch and has a national role as a policy adviser. He describes his current role as being heavily influenced by legislation and regulations which are interpreted and enacted by the organization. He views his work as being shaped and determined by a dual partnership between the government and the institution with little scope for personal influence.

14) Jane   HR Director:

Jane started her career as a graduate in HR for a company called Gerdhert Data Care, after three years she was reporting directly to the MD. She had responsibility for the development of company policies and procedures, which in her words was "sort of HR related". Her natural people skills and abilities were identified by MD who offered to sponsor her to study the professional qualification course by evening classes. She now works for a company manufacturing equipment for the oil industry as the HR Director for Europe with direct report to the Vice-President who is based in Holland. The organizational structure identifies an Eastern Hemisphere (EH), Jane has a dotted line to the EH HR Director operating out of Dubai. She has responsibility for over 5,500 hundred staff in countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as well as more established countries in continental Europe. One of her most recent tasks was to review HR professional standards in each of the countries and found the UK was the only place that has a certified organization like the CIPD – which Jane, in what I came to understand was a typical understatement, found "quite interesting".

15) David   Business Partner

David completed his business studies degree, to quote: "many moons ago". He is currently HR Business Partner in a MNC employing over 23,500 supplying energy to the domestic and industrial markets. He has witnessed several large changes including the realignment of the function from one of four HR Divisional Directors with a responsibility for 2,300 staff to one of two Senior HR Business Partners with a responsibility for 6,000 staff. Dave states: "there is a big push is to get a sort of common understanding and common sharing between the various businesses both here and in Europe, Mexico and Canada. One of the things I am

looking to do early in the new year is to have an integrated HR strategy for the sort of four businesses ensuring wider business exposure to the lines...", the trouble is he concludes, "it's all about the stories and the issues"

16) Martin   Head of HR

Martin graduated from University with a Management Degree followed by a higher degree in Public Policy and Management. He joined a multinational company working in logistics. In 2002 he left and took up a post in HR with another large multinational company with responsibility for both operational day to day issues and strategic developments. Following a re-organisation, having worked for three different HR Directors, Martin was appointed as Head of HR, a post he currently holds. He describes his role and the function as influenced by the personality of the HR Director: We've got a new MD and HR Director ....and that was probably the best thing. The 'influence factor', HR is seen more as part of the business than a support , don't get me wrong, we are still a support function but, suddenly the people didn't just belong to HR you know, they belonged to the business and to the opportunities in there". For Martin, the influence that promoted HR to that of a "taken seriously" function emanated from an individuals "idea" of HR.

17) Rosie   HR Director

Rosie is the HR director for a major British Petroleum company. She joined the company 24 years ago with a PhD in geo-science. For the first 12 years she worked as a technical contributor before broadening her role into commercial and then general business management. In her current role she has 32 direct employees and four agency staff supporting 3,500 people. In addition she has an HR manager in Stabanga, with a team of eight advisers, two in the Shetland Isles and one in Norway. As HR director Rose reports to the strategic performance unit leader, and is therefore a key member of the senior management team. The focus of her role is determined in part by the business needs but also by her own vision. She has considerable influence, for example, she introduced a company wide initiative around 'building capability' which she pioneered in the HR function. As a consequence "a lot of senior HR folk left the organization with probably 50% of the

leadership in HR changed and external hires brought in". Rosie attributes the inspiration for such radical change coming from support she received from a newly appointed Executive Vice-President who was "given a large amount of money by the corporation to bring in an improved HR Global system".

18)   Janice   HR Business Partner

Janice completed her degree in Hospitality Management and particularly enjoyed the module in human resource management. While still completing her final year at University she started her first year of study for her professional HRM qualifications. Her first appointment in HR. was as an advisor but after 1 1/2 years she was made redundant. She secured a second position as an HR advisor but was once again made redundant. Her third and current appointment in HR is with a major British Airways Comapny. After several years with the company in a variety of roles and following a programme of re-structuring Janice was promoted to the post of HR Business Partner. She describes this role as allowing her to "play in areas that HR never normally plays in". Her role is highly strategic and requires her to understand the whole business enterprise.

19)   Amanda*   HR Manager (Excluded)

Amanda is the Cluster HR Manager for a chain of privately owned country house hotels. Her background is in Hotel and Hospitality Management. She has been promoted to a position of managing approximately 600 staff and reporting directly to the M. D. Amanda is not CIPD qualified. The interview was therefore not included in the analysis.

20)   Ian*   HR Manager (Excluded)

Previously Ian has worked for a French company and an American company. During his last nine years with the US Organization he was head of a HR for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Looking for a change in the pace of his life, and a more settled home life he joined a privately owned medium sized company specialising in waste management. Ian is not CIPD qualified. The interview was therefore not included in the analysis.

21)   Robin   HRM Consultant

Following School and National Service Robin worked for Texas Instruments as an Engineering Technician. In 1961, Robin and his young family were relocated to the United States. His assignment was to undertake a job evaluation for the company. In 1966, Robin returned to the UK and completed his postgraduate Masters Degree and his CIPD professional qualification. In 1971 he took up a position as a senior lecturer at a local University and in 1972, while still working part-time, Robin established his consultancy company. In 1988 he joined the company full-time. Since 1988 Robin has worked with in his own very successful HR Consultancy.

22)   Fiona   HR Director

Fiona works for a national emergency rescue service. She is the Director of Human Resources, which includes head of training and head of crewing. She completed her M. A. in Economics, Social History and Politics. While still at University Fiona started working for a charity involved in supporting underprivileged people. She then completed her CIPD qualification and took up a post in a mental health unit as a volunteer. Within a few weeks she had been offered a post as a recruitment officer in that organisation. Within six months Fiona was appointed to an HR post with the local city council. She then took several years out before returning to employment and working her way up to HR Director within an emergency service. She is currently HR Director of a County Wide Emergency Service with responsibility for Uniformed and Civilian staff.

Q: So if you can start by telling me who you are and just go through the interview schedule as you feel comfortable?

A: OK, my name is XXX, I'm currently working as a group project manager, implementing the electronic staff records system within the NHS but my background, throughout my career, has been in HR Management, increasingly senior levels. My current role is much more project management in a specific area but my general background in the NHS, until the last two years, has been as an HR Director. I first became, well I became involved in HR Management or Personnel Management, as it was then, from University and I joined a Graduate Training Scheme with Rolls Royce Engines in Derby. My Degree was in the field of politics and I think it would be fair to say that I happened upon HR as a career option slightly by accident. I was looking for a job in management and with Rolls Royce I was offered such a job specialising in the personnel management area.

The current organization and role in it, well I'm working as a group project manager but I'm effectively managing the implementation of a system across 11 NHS organizations, in which context I have to work with senior HR colleagues and less senior HR colleagues, as well as finance colleagues and, particularly, payroll colleagues, to replace their existing systems, implement the new system. And in order to do that, reviewing existing HR payroll and, in fact, business processes to ensure that those processes fit the new system and the new system matches existing processes. And if there's a mis-match, then we change the processes because, effectively, we have to work with the system. I've been doing that for the last two years. The reason I do that role is because, as an HR person, I have the advantage of understanding most of those HR policies and practices, particularly in the NHS context So

effectively, I'm pretending to be a project manager, I'm really an HR Director implementing a system.

In terms of how has my role changed over the years, until 1990 I was working in the private sector, a series of increasingly senior positions in HR Management until joining the NHS, which was my first Director level role, although looking back nearly 15 years, I'm not entirely sure the term Director was appropriate at that time. 1990-1993 was a period of change in the NHS, they were effectively trying to introduce a concept called, management, it was new to the NHS at the time, well they called it resource management. And when I joined, the hospital I was working in was accountable, as a service, to the area health authority and all the power and authority was vested in the area health authority for a large country. And there was very little scope to actually do anything or use initiative within the organization because most of they key decisions, policies, procedures, development, whatever, was dictated from the area health authority, so fairly centralised. 93 the NHS went through a sea change, well 90-93, and they started creating Trust Hospitals. The idea of a Trust Hospital is that it has a great deal more autonomy over how it manages its own affairs. There's a slight debate over, to what extent any public sector organization has that sort of autonomy and certainly Trust Hospitals where charged with developing local terms and conditions, changing policies and procedures, undertaking organizational development that was appropriate to the service. And for me, personally, I suppose the period, 1990-1993, was waiting the opportunity to actually put into practice some of the things that I'd already been doing in a private sector context. So from 93 to probably about 97/98, my role was about trying to professionalise or improve the Personnel/HR function in the organization, which I work in. To get it to the level where it was making a positive contribution to the service, I think it would be fair to say, we used to call it the difference about moving from administration, because that's what it had been historically, into something that was much more management focused and supportive. The role, for me, has changed with the NHS largely because of, effectively, changes in national policy. As a Trust Hospital, you were just left to do whatever you thought was appropriate for the organization, within a framework, a national framework. Late 90s saw new government with a real focus on improving management of the NHS and particularly, the workforce. So there

was, for the first time, a big emphasis on the importance of HR Management in the NHS, which may have been overlooked before. It was at that time the NHS embraced the idea of being an HR function rather than personnel, whilst I think in the mid 90s, early mid 90s, the term HR had started to replace personnel, that was something that happened in the late 90s, particularly in the NHS. And to an extent, my own perception is, that was changing a title rather than changing the function. I think some of us, we were actually already performing in a different way from the old personnel style but the other thing that happened from 97 onwards, was there became a very stringent national agenda and assessment framework for how effective was the HR Management in any organization. So we have things like, improving working life standards and improving working lives practice plus, which looks at all areas of HR Management and suggests what those areas would look like in any organization performing well. In some contexts it will be simple measures, usual recruitment retention type indicators. In others it will be the provision of occupational health services and staff counselling services. In one sense, it's a bit of a tick box and saying, here's a framework, this is good practice and how well do you match it? Not a bad thing but it certainly raised the profile of HR in the NHS. So in a sense, what has changed my role, has governed my agenda, has been, effectively, changes in national policy, a greater emphasis on HR Management in the general sense. Initially, and most recently, the most recent shift has been towards a focus on what we call, workforce issues, workforce development, which probably can be best interpreted as actually maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the workforce. And when you start to dig into, what does that mean, it's really a lot of common good practice HR stuff, it's looking at development of new roles, more efficient roles. It's looking at reward, it's looking at productivity type issues. I think the title shift from HR to workforce development, if I'm honest, is because we spent many, many millions of pounds investing in the NHS workforce, growing the workforce and there is a perception that, actually, what have we got for our money. So having spent this money, we've got to make sure we get the efficiencies required. But underneath that title change, the focus is still on, what will be, I think, probably regarded as good HR Management practice with a slightly different title.

How would I define a profession? Well it's a much, I think, misused term generally. I've worked for distribution companies where we talk about professional drivers and professional lorry drivers, in terms of, that's their job and that's their career choice and that's what they're going to do probably for most of their career and I suppose they might regard it as a profession. In terms of the true use of the word profession, then for me it's something a bit more substantive than that. It's not a job choice, it's about working in a field that, well the second point, where one is engaged in a professional activity. And I think the start point for that is that. So a profession, in that context and fairly easy choice, might be say accountancy, legal services, medical. I think the important thing is, there is a level at which one becomes a professional as opposed to being a technician, in all those areas you could actually be a technician working in, what might be regarded, as a profession. So a technician might be a nurse, don't quote me on that, they'll kill me. A para-legal person could be a technician as opposed to being a professional. So there's an issue for me about what level of practice one is at and what level of knowledge one is applying that determines whether one is professional or not. So work in HR doesn't make you a professional, the level at which you are working does, which has something to do about what you understand in terms of the application, principles and practice. B: I think has something to do with the responsibility for explaining that to others, knowing yourself isn't enough, you have to be able to explain it to others who may not be professional in the same field. And, ultimately, to be a professional means that you've got to be accountable for the advice you give and if you give the wrong advice, then as a professional, then there should be some form of address or something along those lines. Doctors can be disbarred, solicitors can be disbarred, so I suppose, yes there's a thing I think with professionals about a professional, almost a self regulation. And perhaps a really effective professional is where they persuade everyone else they're so clever and so successful that they're only capable of regulating themselves and no one else can.

Q: Is there anything in this gaining of expert knowledge that you talk about, relating to qualifications or points of entry, barriers to entry, license to practice?

A: If you're asking me personally, then, and I'm answering that in a personal sense as opposed to what another person might answer it, then I think yes, there has to be a formal body of knowledge and it's back to that field of expertise, experience or whatever that is a formal body of knowledge, which has to be learned. In some cases, experience could be acquired but the knowledge itself has to be learned. So you can have, I suppose you can have the knowledge and not be able to apply it, that might disbar you from being a professional. You can have experience without knowledge, which might make you effective in a limited sense. So I think there is a thing about a knowledge base, which is proven by qualification but again, it's at what level because you can learn to become a good recruitment interviewer, does that make you an HR professional? It's a very narrow field although I know people who work in the recruitment field who would say that that's their profession. I'm not entirely sure about that but then again, there are legal people who work in very narrow fields and are regarded as being professional. But then if you look at where you gain entry to those very narrow fields, you actually do a broad based qualification and then you specialise. So perhaps there's an issue there about, there's a broad based qualification, a broad based knowledge one has to acquire. Having gained that, you may or may not become a professional but if you do become a professional, you might actually become more and more specialised in certain areas.

Who assesses your professionalism? In the role I've got at the present time or in the roles I've had in the NHS, I think in fairness, that that judgment is made by the people to whom I provide a service or the person or persons to whom I report. There's an element in there, which is, you've also got to be effective because you can claim to be a professional but if you're not delivering, then you're not effective and it's possible, I suppose, well in the context of what I do, if I'm not delivering or if I'm not being effective, then I expect to lose my job, which hasn't happened yet but the people making those judgments themselves, aren't necessarily knowledgeable about what I do. And I do know of cases where people make judgments about other people without understanding what they're trying to do but I guess that's the way it works. It's whoever you are accountable to, for me, not for everyone, but it's the person whom you've got to satisfy. I think that probably prompts me to say that

sometimes being professional means giving people advice they don't want to hear. I think is particularly true in HR because it's very easy to sort of go with the flow sometimes but actually, if you have a serious belief in you need to do what is right for the organization as opposed to what is, what maybe the organization wants to do, then being professional is about being prepared to stand up and propose a counterview and argue for that point of view. It doesn't mean you actually always succeed and it doesn't mean you actually keep your job as well, either, because you may cause offence. But I do think, again, jumping back a little bit, the professional bit is about sometimes taking, I hate to use the word ethical, but there are matters of principle, which if you believe it's the right way to, in HR terms, manage an organization or manage people, then that's the case you should argue rather than sort of, use the phrase, fall in line with what other people might want to do.

How far do I perceive Personnel/Human Resource Management to be a profession? Well, back to what I've already said I think, it depends, and it's also at an individual level, at what level is a person performing? I don't think a function is itself a profession, it's the person performing the function either is or is not a professional. So you could have a qualification at a lower level, you know, accounting technicians, for example, they're accountants, they've got a qualification but I don't think you would judge them as being professionals. So I think, almost any role could become a profession if it's performed at the right level and to the appropriate standards. So I do think HR Management is a profession but I don't think all people in HR are professionals and that's not a judgment about those people, it's just a matter of fact about the level at which they're performing and contributing.

In terms of what needs to change to further raise HR as a profession? I actually think that there is now probably a higher regard for HR as being a profession than there has been historically. The reason for that or the reason I say that, is that people looking for people to work in that field, work in the field of HR, increasingly do have a specific requirement in terms of a qualification level or a qualification. So I think there has been acceptance there is a body of knowledge and people look for that experience and qualification in that combination before considering people for posts. In the NHS, CIPD membership is an essential for most senior

HR positions. Fellowship is a requirement for the very senior positions. So I think that's an acknowledgement there is something there that is worth having, part of me would then say, well but you are looking for those requirements, is the organization itself looking for someone at that level because it's a bit like having, I've got one of those, it's completed my set. So it's not a criticism, again, of the profession, it's almost a criticism of organizations who recognise there's something there they ought to have but then perhaps don't use it effectively. But again, for me, if you are the professional, as opposed to the person who works in a profession, then I think I would look for anyone moving to an organization, which had not understood, if I'm honest, what it was looking for or seeking to acquire, then the professional contribution is to make the organization aware exactly what you can contribute.

In terms of first bullet under three, not immediately relevant to my current role personally but since I work with people who are in the mainstream HR field and work support them, A: my perspective is that organizations I've worked in have, and probably that's why I've worked in them, have to an extent recognised there is a professional contribution from HR and they support that by making the necessary appointments and then providing the necessary resources, in other words, it's worthwhile we invest in this because we see it as being worthwhile. I also think that the better organizations demonstrate their commitment to good HR Management by requiring that HR Management, HR principles are embedded in the business itself. So the classic example is where, in the health service, people come up with a business case for developing a service, whether that service might be a treatment or a series of treatments, but actually never think about the staffing issues. Or, to paraphrase: we're going to provide this new service, it will cost us millions of pounds and we think it's a good idea because patients will be better. The failure then to think about, and how do you staff this do we have the requisite skills, do we need to develop those skills, do we have people who can develop those skills, are we replacing an existing service for something new and what does that do to the people who are displaced, was not always a part and parcel of the business case. The better organizations, certainly in the NHS now, so will give me the business case and within that, we're looking for the service obligations, the finance consequences and the HR obligations and consequences. A very simple level, better

organizations or organizations that are committed to HR, will have performance review mechanisms, appraisal systems and will expect that the objectives that people are set include, to a greater or lesser extent, HR related objectives. And my personal view is that the most effective organizations actually expect that their managers are capable of demonstrating some knowledge and expertise in the hands on application of HR principles. So - you're a manager, we expect you to have good staff management skills as opposed to having just the title and therefore, the HR function is not just something that sits in the corner and throws out good ideas and good advice but in fact, is actually seeking to, at best I suppose, share some best practice and inculcate it within the organization. So that managers themselves are assuming that responsibility but then again, good managers have always been good managers because they have good management skills. And poor managers probably just have poor management skills, in a staff sense.

What would need to change to raise the profile of Personnel/HR? I think, again, my recent experience, because I've talked about the national agenda, which is a real agenda in the NHS, it has a profile for lots of reasons. If you can't effectively pass the HR agenda, then there's lots of other things you cannot do and that's helpful in an HR management sense, I think. If you want to become a foundation trust, for example, which is currently the highest state of being for NHS organizations, then you don't become a foundation trust unless you will also be able to satisfy the HR management agenda, as well as the finance agenda, as well as the service quality agenda. So I think, for me, probably the biggest change would actually be for the organization to become more and more demanding about the contribution of HR as opposed to, we've got one, we've got a function, we've got people who do this and they do a good job, is actually, well how they do a better and better job. How are we measuring how effective that contribution is in the sense of, we can all offer advice, we can develop good policies but the difference between having a good policy in a written form and actually having a good policy in its applied form, there is a difference there. So what are the key metrics for HR because I think that's where we're not good at the moment. We'll go off and measure absence and we'll go off and measure turnover but are those the important metrics for

measuring the HR contribution, probably not. So I suppose, what I'm saying is, I think there should be a bigger challenge to HR to prove the contribution it's making at the bottom line.

Q: What would be the right metrics for measuring?

A: Ah, well there's a good question because I do think that's fairly organization specific. I can sort of almost slightly avoid it because let's take, well let's take absence, is high absence good or bad? Well it's bad because it's inefficient but then, let's use the health service context specifically since the staff side often play it back to me, do you want sick people to come to work? And, of course, in a healthcare setting, no you don't but you need to be sure they're sick, no you don't want to come to work. So, no, absence itself per se is not a good measure. Turnover, is high turnover good or bad? Well that rather depends whether you want high turnover or not. High turnover can be fairly inefficient but actually, in the right area, it could be a good thing because it means if you have high turnover, well in terms of wastage, then perhaps it's an area you want to thin down, it saves other means of having to reduce the staffing. So I actually think there's a whole raft of indicators but you need to understand whether those indicators are important at any point in time to the organization. And I think there's also a whole series of issues about, how do you link some of those HR indicators back to performance of the organization? So, for example, we would look at things like, high agency usage is not good because it's expensive but can you show that high agency usage also means a lower level of care potentially because you've got people who are not, let's say either familiar with your environment or not committed necessarily to the organization, that's not fair on all agency people. But I mean it's a fact of life that a locum doctor comes in, walks in, has no clue where he's walked into, hasn't worked in that organization and can't find the pharmacy, now that can be a problem. So we have put a lot of emphasis into, when people join as locums, then they must have an induction period. If a locum walks in at 2 o'clock in the morning, then giving his induction could be a bit of a problem. So there's a raft. I'm not trying to avoid it but there are, you know, we look at things like recruitment efficiency, how fast can you fill a vacancy? And that's a useful measure of efficiency in one sense but are you filling the vacancy with the right person? So what are the longer term measures for the

effectiveness of people? And it's a fact of life, if you recruit, then you never know how good the person you didn't select is but you might find out how bad the one you did select is. So I think there's a whole field of metrics where we need to understand what those measures mean and then say, are they relevant at this point in time for this organization, is that what we want to influence? Do we want to reduce absence, what is an acceptable level of absence because nil probably isn't, what is a realistic level of absence and how are we managing that absence? So you could have low levels of absence but it's the same person who's absent all the time, as opposed to a series of different people being absent. Now actually it's poor if one person, say for example, in one department is the person whose always absent, actually that's poor HR management. If the absence is shared, not in the equitable sense but it's spread around, then you may actually say, well that's an acceptable level of absence because it's about the numbers. I do think that's where HR, particularly, is weak. We tend to be better at the sort of softer things. I mean one of my favourite examples is training, IT trainers in particular love coaching, they love to sit down with the secretary, the word processing person, the input clerk, on a one to one basis and help them. I like to see IT trainers with 20 people in the room, teaching them all at the same time, bums on seats, that's a productivity issue for me. Actually doing a one to one coaching is nice for the IT trainer, it's also very lazy. So for me, I've always, much to the annoyance of some of the people I've worked with, one of my first indicators for a trainer is, OK, what's your throughput? How many people are actually attending because I'm not interested in 5 enjoying the experience, it was a nice personal experience, I want 20 people to enjoy it and get benefit from it. And then at the end of the course, of course, you give them the happy sheet to fill in and we all sit back and say, oh isn't this great, we've got really high scores. Yes because you ask them to fill it in while you're there and they do, why don't you go back after a couple of weeks and say, OK, what are you doing differently, what's improved? And if nothing's being done differently, nothings improved, then just stop doing it or change what you're teaching. So I think that's a lot of the challenges that we've got a long way to go. I think the Americans teach us to do things around that actually, that's how it's going.

How far does the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development influence the status of HR Management as a profession? Well I've mentioned already, I think the member qualification is becoming increasingly important and recognized, not necessarily understood but recognized. And I do think, listening today on the radio and so forth, I think CIPD, not for the sake of saying nice things about the CIPD, but in recent years has raised its game in terms of contributing to news programs or so forth. And I do think that some of the research type publications have, I still think they're fairly narrow circulation or I don't see them as being immediate references for a lot of HR practitioners. So I think there's an issue there about, how is the membership using, for example, the CIPD website? And I put my hands up at this point and say, actually, I very rarely go there although when I do go there, of course, one finds some very interesting information. So I think the professional body itself has done a good job of raising the profile of HR, whether it's led that or has been pulled up by a wider appreciation, I don't know. I really don't know what else the CIPD might do as a lead body to raise the profile of Personnel/HR. Part of me is slightly uncomfortable about pushing the qualification as being a badge or a profession for the reasons I've already indicated. I don't think having a qualification itself is enough, it's a starter point for being a professional. And if I go back on my very early comments about, to what extent are people regulated by their professional bodies? And I think, one has to accept that we're a long way short of being regulated in the same way that some of the other more traditional professions are regulated in terms of regulation, for want of repeating myself, I know what I mean to say, I'll get there in a minute. But then, if you say, well, could you ever envisage a situation where HR professionals are held to account by disciplinary panels convened by the CIPD as opposed to the British Medical Association or whatever the lawyers have, no I can't because actually I think, historically, they are slightly different. They have established over, let's be honest, almost hundreds of years now, a regulatory framework that is just a lot more mature than where the CIPD would ever get to and I'm not even sure it would ever want to get there. I wouldn't like to see it get there anyway.

Q: Why?

A: I don't know the answer to that, well I do know the answer to that. I suppose to a degree, is that I'm not entirely comfortable with the self regulation that's practiced by the medical profession or the legal profession either. I think it's better than it was but actually, I think that ultimately for me, and I think probably where I come from in a managerial sense, is I think the ultimate sanction is the employers sanction, frankly. It's, you know, the employers, the employer should have the ultimate sanction and that's whether or not you work for them or continue to work for them.

Q: Is there anything else that you think is worthy of a mention that we haven't had the chance to discuss?

A: I can't think of anything off hand. Have you any questions for me?

Q: No, I do think that you sort of went back, it was about the CIPD, it was about the sanctions that they may or may not impose. One of the things that you said earlier was that one of the limitations of HR being seen as a profession was that it needed to make the organization aware of what it can contribute, how?

A: Yes, I suppose that's again about the issue about being a new profession, in a sense, or a relatively new profession. Everyone goes to their doctor and knows exactly what the doctor's going to do for them, they think, let's put it that way. Everyone goes to a lawyer and they know what the lawyer is going to do for them, they think they're going to be offered advice, treatment, help, whatever. I think with HR because it's relatively new, in a professional sense, and perhaps because it's not been as professional across the board as one might wish for it to be, then a lot of the clients, the people for whom one is trying to provide a service, don't begin to understand what one can offer, maybe because they've not seen it being offered before. Often I think they think, well we know just as much as you do and in some contexts, perhaps they do. People working in, let's say, a line management function may actually be excellent staff managers, as good as your HR Director, if your HR Director happens to be a good staff manager or whatever, because people acquire

experience in different fields. But I think HR is about a series of, although I made the point that professionals may specialise, I still think there are a series of practices, activities, areas of work, which taken together constitute the HR function and a good professional will have a handle on the best practice, the best practices in most of those fields if not all of them or will know where to go in order to acquire information or advice. So, in a sense, it's an educative thing and when I made the point that people go to their doctor knowing what the doctor's going to do for them, what most people understand, of course, is that doctors are trained in diagnosis not treatment.

Q: So do you think, is there a sense in which this specialisation, be it in compensation and benefit or training or recruitment and selection, enhances or limits the professional standing of the function?

A: I think the specialisation itself enhances the standing of the function because it's a recognition that this is a specialist area. We've gone to a level where the application of principals is so in-depth that it deserves itself to be called a specialism. And comp and Ben, a classic example, I suppose, that's not about paying people, it's about rewarding people, it's about measuring the contribution that people make, it's about measuring the contribution of the jobs and so forth, well that's about, say job evaluation. I've worked with people, who in the field of job evaluation, are clearly, in my view, not only specialists but highly professional because they understand, not just one scheme, they understand the principles behind that scheme and, in fact, they understand the principles behind a variety of schemes. A professional will not sell you the scheme they've been trained in applying, they will sell you the scheme that is appropriate for the organization. So that's a bit of a judgment again, it's about the breadth of knowledge but applying what is appropriate training or development or education and development or whatever you want to call it. Now anyone can run a training course, anyone can run a training scheme but is that the right scheme for what the organization requires and can you demonstrate, that as a result of the introduction and the operation of that scheme, that course, whatever, that there's been an improvement? You can be a very skilled presenter, which would make you seem to be a good trainer but actually it's

the sickability bit. We're back to the metrics bit, which I haven't quite cracked yet but, you know, organizations that measure their training in terms of their per capita spend, well they might be better spending that money on boxes of chocolates that will improve motivation but it may not be improving performance. It's that training itself, so how clever, how smart are we, can we measure the contribution? And I think sometimes, no, for me, at the right level, being a professional is actually being prepared to say, well actually we can't prove that direct link, let's at least be honest enough to admit that.

Q: Thank you.....my goodness we have covered some ground...is there anything else you would like to say or talk about?

A: No, as you say we have gone over some things in this interview, I hope you are able to use some of the material.

Q: I am sure I will; thank you so much for your time. If there is nothing else, I will turn the recorder off and simply say a very big thank you for your time and support.

Sally: Personnel Manager

EdD Research Interview – Glasgow Nov 06

Interview 001-A_003_Julia_2006

Q: So thank you very much for agreeing to do this and in your own way, if you want to work through the interview schedule, that would be brilliant.

A: I take it you want to go back to the start, when I joined and it wasn't HR, it was personnel function, OK. I joined straight from University, having done an Arts Degree. I went into, it was called a graduate trainee role. During that period, I started the professional course but I didn't actually complete it, probably reasons why, I'd been studying and I didn't want to study anymore at that point in time. And I then joined, the graduate traineeship was in local government, so I actually worked in local government until I took a career break. I had a career break for, I think it was about seven years. Return was actually interesting to me, I actually, I did various short courses, just really because I felt the need for it while I wasn't working. And I think the main drive of it was a course, particularly for women and it was run by Strathclyde University. It was Opportunities Now, it was, I think, a European funded one and that actually gave me the confidence to go back into the profession and actually I probably found I was more up to date than some of the people in it. So I then worked my way through the function, as then was a personnel function and eventually, that changed. I actually, when I came back to work again, I think I had about thirty fixed term contracts, which was quite interesting. They were sort of terrified to make people permanent. I would say I also suffered loss of earnings, in that when I came into the market place I had no sort of market value and therefore, I had to make my way back up, so that was quite interesting. And then eventually here, the profession changed from personnel into HR but that wasn't until, I think, very late in terms of most organizations, I think it was 2000/2001.

My current role is not specified. At the moment, I largely determine what it is and it's actually a combination of different areas. I previously worked in a generalist role and that was

supporting schools and departments and that was over the whole range of HR work. I did quite a lot of work in sort of organizational change restructuring and my role at the moment is a combination of, I've been working on equality and diversity. I've been writing a strategy on the management of stress, work in the area of pensions, some trade union work. It's not defined, so it's a bit flexible and I largely determine, by looking at legislation, what needs to be done and that's, I really set my own priorities with that. And I suppose the key factors for change really have been the, to a certain extent, the modernisation that is taking place in higher education. A great need for really restructuring and sort of realigning the organization to really the changing market place out there. And very heavily driven by legislation and that's particularly in the area of equality. That's the kind of key factors.

Q: You talked about the change being from personnel to HR coming later than most organizations, 2000/2001, what are the key differences that you would identify as signifying this change from PM to HR?

A: I mean I think in the organization here, personnel was very much an administrative, largely administrative function. I don't think it had developed, the personnel function as far as some other organizations did. So it was largely administrative support and it certainly lagged behind other organizations. The change then came when they appointed a Director of HR and that was the key pivot to change the focus of the department.

Q: From being administrative support?

A: From administrative support to being, really to HR, you're there to support the business.

Q: Do you think that that change in title, from personnel to Human Resource and the appointment of a HR Director, did those organizational developments have any influence over the status of the function within the organization, did it have any influence over the way

people felt about how important their job was in the context of the University or the College, as was?

A: I think it changed the function to be seen as more part of the business at the top level of the organization. However, here maybe for various reasons it failed, I think, to deliver on that level of input. And I think what needed to happen was that basic HR still has an administrator function and in certain areas you must deliver on the basics before you're seen to be able to deliver at a higher level. I mean it has supported some change, I think, at a higher level, some necessary restructuring and it has supported at that level.

Q: When you say that it needs to deliver on the basic functions, that it still has an admin function.

A: It still has an admin function and I think often, the function is judged by it's failings in minor areas with administration because of the necessary problems and waste of resource, basically, that that causes. I think if you're to convince people of the value of HR, you have to deliver on the basics.

Q: And are you suggesting therefore, that in this institution it's perhaps not delivered on the basics as effectively as it might have done or could have done and therefore, it has struggled to be accepted at a higher level?

A: That I would say is part of the case. I would also say, part of it was that at the input at the higher level was not always seen or agreed as a positive approach. There were tensions between the objectives of senior management out into the academic business. That has now changed in that the academic business is now more part of the management decision making, that now that HR at senior level has been, is of the lower status, that Director level in terms of organization structure is at a lower level than it previously was. So that has only happened recently, so time will tell as to what affect that has.

Q: So why has it been downgraded?

A: I mean organizations are political, as you know, animals and I think that's perhaps contributed to it.

Q: Would that be a personality issue as well as an organization?

A: I would say, yes.

How would you define a profession? It must have a set of professional standards. It must have levels of membership that are achieved, I would say, on an evidence base and that can be qualifications and competences, a requirement for continual professional development, which again must be evidence based and I think moved to an outcome base as well. Examples of other professions, I'd say accountancy is a potential comparator. Why? Obviously, they have a professional body, professional standards. I probably don't know enough about the accountancy structure to know what's the similarities and what the difference is. That's my nearest example to working in an organization.

Q: That's fine. Within those benchmarks, would you go as far as to suggest a profession needs to have a licence to practice? So like a lawyer would need or a doctor would need?

A: I would say that's probably necessary because if people don't work towards or not towards, they must work to the standards of a professional body and there must be a means therefore, that where people fail to work to those standards that they can no longer continue to have the membership status, whatever level of that body.

Q: Obviously, at the minute, CIPD don't do they?

A: No, that's a problem.

Perceptions of being professional? It's working to a set of professional standards that you don't compromise. The rights that are contained in employment law and whilst you may have, there are business issues you need to take into account, you can't compromise the rights of individuals. It would be that you must have continued professional development.

Q: Do you see those criteria that you've just talked about in terms of being professional as an individual, are they characteristics that are imposed upon the individual or are they perhaps a framework that is self imposed, almost self regulatory?

A: At the moment it is, it's self-imposed, self-regulated because there's a vast area of professions out in various private industries that will not have the same self imposed standards.

Q: Is there a sense in which you, as an HR professional, have your own code of conduct, your own personal value set, your own personal levels of integrity, that guide and influence what you do perhaps more than a CIPD code of conduct might guide? I guess my question is, could you still act as a professional with integrity irrespective of the role of the CIPD or irrespectively of your professional qualifications?

A: Yes, I think you could but then I don't think then, you could not then have it judged on a professional basis because everybody would, you know, who would determine what's an appropriate standard? The standard you set may not be sufficient or it may be too severe, so I think there is a need to set a reasonable standard.

Who assesses your professionalism? I'm not sure what that's asking.

Q: Well it's sort of asking about, does it matter, to whom does it matter? So in this context, it might be that actually Paisley University assess your professional conduct and it might be that the organization imposes requirements upon you that are over and above your own interpretation. For example, if the organization were to make people, operated in a way

that people had specialist responsibilities for training and development, specialist responsibilities for absence management, specialist responsibilities for grievance and discipline, that they would assess your professionalism in the context of HR by how much knowledge you had acquired within that specialist sphere but your assessment of your own professionalism might be, I need to have an overall understanding of what it means to be professional. Somebody else might work as a consultant and their professionalism would be assessed by the client. And what it's really sort of unpicking or attempting to unpick is, is it easy to articulate who assesses your professionalism or is it a multitude of players? So it could be the employees in your context, in the University, it could be your line manager, it could be other managers in the institution, it could be the board of directors, it could be the employees and the impact that your role has on them. And so I guess it's sort of heading towards territory that says, we are a professional but actually assessing what we do and how we do it is actually quite complicated because there are multiple players.

A: Yes, I mean I think it's actually very difficult for an organization to say it's, for example, if you took your chief executive or principal, unless they have actually specific knowledge, they are relying that you are providing them with appropriate professional knowledge and how can they actually determine, when something goes wrong they may determine that it's failing, but how do they determine that that is producing the best range of professional input that is possible? And I think because, as you say, there's quite a lot of different areas in HR, not always have the same level of knowledge even within a department and therefore, people manage quite a diverse range of staff and don't necessarily have themselves the knowledge. So I think it's actually quite difficult. I think colleagues are able to actually judge to a certain extent, the professionalism of others, if that's their area of knowledge.

How far do we perceive to be a profession? I think that depends very much on what input you're having to the organization at that time. If you're perceived as having a positive and you're, as I say, adding value to the organization, you're affecting change, you're supporting change, however I don't know if it's seen as a profession. Is it just seen as a. I mean we're

often termed an advisory function. So I mean I perceive as it's professional knowledge but how others perceive it is another matter.

Q: Do you think there's a difference between people whose perception of HR as a profession is influenced by whether they're within or without a function?

A: I think so, yes and in terms of what advice or support they've been, you know, how it has impacted on their area of work. It would be interesting to know, how do they perceive an HR practitioner as opposed to an accountant, do they see a difference? I don't know.

Q: I think that's really valuable. I mean this particularly piece of research is just being concerned with, do HR professionals see themselves as or HR practitioners, do they seem themselves as professionals?

A: Of course your views are influenced by how you perceive others, to perceive yourself as well as what you might perceive. You're aware that, you may have a perception that you're a professional role, how do others perceive you?

Q: Yes, I think the next bit of research would have to take it beyond our own circle of friends, as it were, get the real picture from others, yes.

A: Another interesting area now is with job evaluation, that then determines a different set of comparators. And that then makes one consider, well how is one, how is that arrived at. how do you then, you have a different set of people to compare yourself with. I mean one example might be that, obviously, the modernisation agenda is increasing the pay for academic staff, in that sense, I don't disagree with that and I think there was a need for increased pay but staff like HR practitioners are then actually evaluated at a lower level than they were previously. So what is that saying? That a lecturer in HRM and a practitioner, and that's quite interesting to look at, what are the perceived differences? I mean it is very specific to the organization you work in and I think that's where you'll find quite a c: of

differences and perhaps you just have a new director maybe in a couple of years time, the profile maybe hopefully, you know, as maybe recognised more.

Q: So at the moment the answer would be, no, we're not considered to be a profession within the organization but we're heading in that direction?

A: I think so but because the Director is not at the board level in the management team, which is something HR has always fought for, it will be interesting to see how that develops.

Q: Many of the next bits we might have already covered.

A: In fact that first question probably does. I think it very much is in terms of where your organization is, what's the leadership. Also, some of the issues that the organization is facing, particularly when we're looking at merger issues, the input of HR then may actually sort of enhance how HR contributes to the business. I think one of the negatives is seen as because there is, recently there's been such a raft of legislation, almost the perception is, here is HR again, they've written another few laws and that's quite a tricky one.

Change, I'm not sure if I can answer that one, what would need to change? I think more understanding of, and maybe more discussion of how HR can contribute, a better understanding between HR and between the academic schools and business areas. I think there needs to be more joint working so that we're working towards same objectives. I think a better understanding would be the key there, I would say.

CIPD, it's certainly, I mean the profession has obviously, the institute has developed. Have a professional body if you are to influence profession. I think it needs to change its standards It probably stands at a difficult point in time, in that there will be people with status within the organization, not within the organization, but have professional status that have been acquired just by the very fact of being in roles and I think it's area like that that probably have diminished the professional standing.

Q: Are you saying that, people who currently work in HR are there and have been there for a long time and gained experience?

A: I mean they've basically acquired, like say fellowship purely by what status of. time served, they have a status of a role in an organization and I think unless they can deliver in accordance with that status, that has affected probably perception. I mean, obviously. some do but obviously, some don't and if there's no, to some extent, regulation, the status doesn't mean a great deal. And I think many practitioners might say, well, what does? That status on paper looks fine but what does it actually mean in practice?

Q: So when somebody has qualified or once somebody has acquired a position through time served and experience, that there is nothing that then subsequently assesses their competence to practice and you feel that that's something that's missing in raising the whole profile of HR? That somebody could have been working for the last twenty five years and actually be completely ineffective but still considered a fellow of the institute?

A: That's right, they may actually not have kept themselves professionally developed and because there's been such a raft of changes, you know, I think you couldn't expect your organization to be recognised unless you've kind of evidence that people can deliver at that level.

Q: Would you take that as far as having a license to practice?

A: It depends what that would actually mean, in what would you require to achieve and to be judged on to practice. How would that be judged, what evidence would be needed? It would have to be sufficient to be able to show that the person is knowledgeable about the area they work in and has practical examples of what they've achieved. How you can actually judge the validity of that, I think, is the main difficulty. People can submit evidence of what

they've done etc but how would you judge, how do you actually judge that it's valid, that : achieved what it sets out to achieve?

Q: But instinctively, are you sort of suggesting that if it were possible to manage the logistics of how you ensure validity, how you ensure currency, how you ensure appropriateness, that some sort of assessment, periodic assessment or periodic review, where a practitioner was required to demonstrate currency and competence would be a good thing?

A: Well I mean, if we took another profession, that's what I think I would want to know, how's that done in other professions? How, for instance, is it done for an accountant?

Q: It's done with GPs and it's done with people in the British Psychological Society, where they have regulatory CPD that they have to evidence and they have a minimum number of hours that they have to participate in. With GPs it's recently been linked to renewal of contracts but it's exactly what you've just described but it's achieved to a process of appraisal, where they have to have sort of peer review, peer assessment of their competence to continue to practice. And it's linked in with the contract renewal and it's linked in with appraisal but it's exactly what you've just described.

A: And I think within an organization, you may not have the expertise there to professionally judge, you know, people are doing specific roles.

Q: But then maybe that links into the role of the CIPD as a professional lead body.

A: Yes, I mean it would be interesting to look at other professions like civil engineers architects etc, what do they need to do? I think one of the things that, if one was required to have that, organizations then need to take account of the need for staff to have time for professional development. I mean it's largely self driven and often in ones own time

Q: And it remains that way with the CIPD because they have been anything bu' prescriptive about what CPD means and they do feel there's this void between very pleasant applications that are supposed to appeal to people's good nature to participate in CPD and is complete ignorance of anybody that fails to, you know, well you haven't done it, oh really you should, we understand you're busy, you know. So the gap between the two is huge.

A: That's right and I think, I mean I perceive to say there was a drive to increase everybody's level of membership in the organization but, you know, when you actually saw what had to be submitted, it was, I would say it was somewhat questionable.

Q: And I suppose that draws attention to some of the tensions that are resting between individual practitioners and the CIPD as the professional body. The CIPD, as a professional body, want to increase membership, that is there strategic objective. To do that they're almost diluting the level of membership entry.

A: Level of membership of what's required for it, yes and they suddenly, it also increases their income by more members and by the higher up you go, so yes, they're a business.

Q: But I think that's interesting, whether there are tensions between the function of HR being seen as a profession and the agenda of the CIPD as a business.

A: I think there's actually, I tend to, I mean there is some very good publications from the CIPD but also there are other bodies that probably I would rely on more for input of professional knowledge. So if, you know, CIPD then they would have to look at, well do we accept, let's say you were doing x under another body, they would then have to take a judgment on that. And because there's so many different sectors, you know, there's a vast range of places one goes to look for different professional input and sort of examples of what's happened in practice. I mean you use, you go to ACAS, you know, ACAS, we've got a professional employers' body in higher education and that's where you actually acquire a of of your professional knowledge.

Q: The territory isn't just them.

A: It's not exclusively, yes, I think that's quite important, that there are many other significant players in the area. I sometimes think we have to have sometimes as much knowledge as employment lawyers as well, which is quite interesting. I think that's, the amount of employment law knowledge we have to have I think is very significant now. It makes it a more interesting job but I think, you know, otherwise one spends ones time asking lawyers advice and OK, they have a different perspective when they give advice than people actually working in the business, so it's interesting.

Q: Is there anything else?

A: I don't think so, no unless there's anything you want to ask me.

Q: Perhaps the one thing that we haven't covered, if I just quickly mention it is, educational routes into membership. So whether the qualification structure is in any way significant in supporting or limiting the HR function as a profession?

A: Obviously, there's an opportunity there for people to do different professional qualifications and that is quite a sound base of a profession. It really is and I mean a qualification that was taken when I did it, is so, in fact almost, I mean some of the foundations yes, of employment law are still there but a lot of the more HR part, you know, is a developing, is a continuum.

Q: That links directly back, doesn't it, to your currency, validity and competence, to practice?

A: Yes because it's so vastly changed.

Q: Is there anything else you would like the opportunity to talk about?

A: No, I think we have pretty much covered it all.

Q: Well, in that case, please may I say thank you and I'll turn the recorder off.

Appendix Ten: Phenomenographic Categories of Description Arising From Data Analysis

Research Question One   Personnel Background

The Category of Description Professional Background	Referential Aspect *The 'whatness' of the phenomenon'* *What is the meaning*	Internal Horizon *The relation between the subject and the object*	External Horizon *Relating to an external context*
Previous Career	P/HRM as a second career choice	Relationship between People and Business	P/HRM as a 'lesser' career choice
Significance of a University Degree	Increasing demands for a high level of academic excellence and attainment	High personal drive and achievement orientation of individual	Educational attainment and personal achievement perceived as synonymous with competence and ability
Descriptions of Role within Organization	Description of roles varied according to title, function and whether Personnel or HRM	Differentiation of responsibilities and status of Personnel or HRM	Administrative focus of Personnel contrasted with strategic focus and enhanced status of HRM
Extent of Personnel/ HRM Role Change	Shifting traditional P/HRM role functions and boundaries	Development of new skill set in response to business agenda	Potential compromise of collective identity as P/HRM function dissipates
Key Influencing Factors in the Drive for Change in the P/HRM	New appointment in organization, new demands from global business	Positive development versus potential threat	Realignment and commercialised professionalism of function
Changing Nature of Business	Changing demands of business	Organizational response to make new CEO/Senior appointment	Visible change seen as positive response to new business demands
External Influences	Audit, legislation and performance culture	Context driven by non P/HRM issues	'Commercialised Professionalism'

Principal Perception: Change, at the level of the function and the organization are influencing the profession and being professional in the context of Personnel and HRM.

Summary of Phenomenographic Categories of Description Arising from Data Analysis

Research Question Two   Being Professional

The Construction Being Professional	Referential Aspect *The 'whatness' of the phenomenon'* *What is the meaning*	Structural Aspect Internal Horizon *The relation between the subject and the object*	Structural Aspect External Horizon *Relating to an external context*
Defining a Profession	Traits associated with established professions used as benchmark	Characterised by disjuncture between some established traits and current enactment	Profession not as a collective project but as an individual project of 'self'
Perceptions of Being a Professional	Personnel Integrity, Own code of Conduct, Ethical Behaviour	Defined by relationship between self and the work organization	Marginal role for Professional Institute
Professionalism and Trust	Trust mediated through accreditation and a licence to practice	Trust in P/HRM constructed as trust in ones own professional integrity	Trust as a collaborative, equal and mutual relationship between individual and actor
P/HRM as a Profession	Limited if benchmarked against established professions	As an aspiring Profession, no controlled entry, no licence to practice	Evolving concept of a profession locating different skill set with an emphasis on the individual
Raising the Profile of P/HRM	Variation between Public and Private Sectors.	In Private sector strong relationship between profile, business knowledge and promotion of self and the function by practitioner	Quantifiable demonstration of value added and contribution to bottom line

Principal Perception: The individual is increasingly responsible for their own professional image and status. It is the individual practitioner's business acumen combined with the development and execution of appropriate political, liaison and negotiation skills which enable them to demonstrate value to the organization that ensures their professional credibility.

Summary of Phenomenographic Categories of Description Arising from Data Analysis

Research Question Three   Organizational Perspective

The Construction Organizational Perspective	Referential Aspect *The 'whatness' of the phenomenon'* *What is the meaning*	Structural Aspect Internal Horizon *The relation between the subject and the object*	Structural Aspect External Horizon *Relating to an external context*
Organizations constructed as messy arenas	Context specific so caution in treating as similar	Organizational culture highly specific	Different organizations demand different professional knowledge and skills
Organizational influence on role and status of P/HRM	Organizational business needs define professional knowledge required in order to be effective	Individual responsibility to acquire specific business knowledge, and to demonstrate Know how as well as know what	Formal CIPD accreditation confers insufficient business knowledge
Playing in new areas	Pushing the boundaries of traditional activities and knowledge	Emphasis on individual to promote self and function	Demands new skills set of networking, communication, negotiation
Continuing emphasis on 'self'	Professionalism occurs at the level of the individual not on the collective function. Limited identity with others	Professional reliance on the 'Self' to promote own abilities and influence status of function in work organization	Reconstruction and reorientation of perceptions of a profession from the collective to the individual
Role of Self and Work Organization	Meaning structured around confused role of Professional Institute in guiding behaviour, possible subjugation of self to organization	Emphasis on mutuality, not seen as conflict orientated. Relationship exclusive but interdependent	Reconstruction and reorientation of professional relationship between self and work organization as one of symbiotic harmony
Principal Perception: Influence of work organization in defining the role and status of the function and therefore of the individual practitioner, but not seen as conflicting.			

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Summary of Phenomenographic Categories of Description Arising from Data Analysis

Research Question Four   The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

The Construction Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development	Referential Aspect *The 'whatness' of the phenomenon'* *What is the meaning*	Structural Aspect Internal Horizon *The relation between the subject and the object*	Structural Aspect External Horizon *Relating to an external context*
CIPD as holding limited relevance	Good for helping practitioners get into the occupation but of limited use in helping people to getting on in the occupation	Relationship characterised by one of distance and perception of a lack of relevance to day to day role, organization or career development	CIPD as having lost touch with the membership and their needs, especially at more senior and strategic levels of operation
Commercial Versus Professional	Tensions between competing interests within the Professional Institute	Relationship characterised by one in which members are uncertain what the CIPD stands for, its remit or areas of control	Currently uncertain of focus or future direction – not seen as particularly strong or as leading when compared an other Professional Institution
Compromising the Value of Chartered Status	Chartered Status once regarded as the gold standard but now regarded as free to all	Increasing membership numbers perceived as having assumed an unhealthy priority	Perceptions of standards being eroded and image compromised
Code of Professional Conduct	Perceived as important criteria for many established professions	Perceptions of weak and distant Professional Institute unable to impose sanctions	Conflicting perceptions with role of self as mediator of own professionalism
Continuing Professional Development	Perceived as hall mark of on going demonstration of competence to practice	Professional Institute unable to enforce and monitor engagement with CPD	Conflicting perceptions with role of self as mediator of own professionalism

Principal Perception: Limited role of the Professional Institute in defining or influencing the professional image, development or conduct of experience of practitioners.

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Appendix Eleven: A Summary of Respondents Perceptions of Personnel/HRM as a Profession

Name	Title	Perceptions of P/HRM as a Profession	Summary
1. Eric	Training Officer	The fact that it's engaged with other people, I would like to think that it automatically becomes a profession. If by being professional tends to account the things I've just referred to, the politeness and courtesy etc, etc because if it doesn't do that it only makes life more difficult to transact business with someone, whether they're paid for the service or not. And in terms of how far I consider that to be a profession, I suppose if you cease to deliver the service by not meeting that criteria, then if I've defined professional as being that, then QED, it ends at that point.	Not Sure
2. Ray	Consultant	In a loose sense, it definitely is probably because if I said it wasn't and then I compared other organizations or other what's called, the job functions, like marketing and accounting, who would see themselves as professions as would the plumbers and everything else, it would seem a bit daft if we didn't call ourselves a profession. If you then sort of say, well what are the boundaries for the HR profession? Then that gets very, very difficult indeed.	Not Sure
3. Gill	HR Manager	I do believe, I believe HRM is a profession, at the level I'm doing it, I would say. I'm not sure as a personnel administrator, whether that is classed as a profession.	Not Sure
4. Judith	HR Manager	How far do you perceive personnel/human resource management to be a profession? It's becoming more and more of a profession every year that passes.	Not yet
5. Wayne	HR Director	How far do I perceive personnel/human resource management to be a profession? Well, back to what I've already said I think, it depends, and it's also an individual level, at what level is a person performing? I don't think a function is itself a profession, it's the person performing the function either is or is not a professional.	No
6. Sally	Personnel Manager	How far do we perceive to be a profession? I think that depends very much on what input you're having to the organization at that time. If you're perceived as having a positive and you're, as I say, adding value to the organization, you're affecting change, you're supporting	Not Sure

		change, however I don't know if it's seen as a profession. Is it just seen as a, I mean we're often termed an advisory function. So I mean I perceive as its professional knowledge but how others perceive it is another matter.	
7. Katie	Training Manager	In terms of how far do I perceive HR to be a profession? I still think it does depend on the company, so not really.	**Not Sure**
8. Karen	Business Partner	Well it sort of is. I couldn't actually, hand on heart say to you that I believe it is up there with accountants or the medical profession and that's largely I think about a sort of lack of public recognition of the roles and abilities and competence level of the role Can I answer I think it's a 'sort of a profession'? I think it is sort of a profession.	**Sort Of**
9. Jackie	HRM Lecturer	Yes, I perceive it to be a profession, though not necessarily always delivered in a professional manner.	**Yes**
10. Mary	HRM Lecturer	It's a Quasi Profession. Its aspiring and until it gets the regulatory framework in place I don't think it meets the criteria of a profession in the same sense as the Law Society or the BMA.	**Sort Of**
11. Nigel	HR Director	Yes it's a profession because of requirement for wide knowledge base.	**Yes**
12. Linda	HRM Lecturer	I think it is a profession. I think it's becoming more of a profession and I think it's really good they're doing all the sort of upgrades. And they are becoming more inclusive.	**Not Sure**
13. Chris	Diversity Manager	I think you could probably say it's an aspiring profession but again, I'm not entirely convinced where the CIPD wants to take that in the sense that, do they actually want, the licensing must be mandatory membership, sort of thing. And I don't sense any great need or great drive towards that for the government or business or CBI, for example, don't seem to be pushing for more professional HR people.	**Sort Of**
14. Jane	HR Director	I do perceive the Human Resource function as a profession but the other thing that I think defines it as a profession is how it's perceived externally. So I don't think everyone would consider it to be a profession and I think my perception of it is probably by the fact that I'm in it and I treat it as a profession.	**Sort Of**
15. David	Business Partner	I think because HR is, and I know we can go back historically but, I think in it's most recent sort of format, it's quite a new profession.	**Sort Of**

16. Martin	Head of HR	Yes, I think Human Resources; I think you definitely see it as a profession because I think the way it's changed from personnel. I know historically, it's always been personnel and HR is quite a new sort of title for it but I think, as a profession, it has become quite elitist and almost snobby.	**Yes**
17. Rosie	HR Director	I think a profession is a defined skill set that can add value or bring about something. So I would regard as HR is a profession, there is a distinct skill set and I think that's where XXXhas changed. It hasn't in the past regarded it as a profession with the same standing as say, the legal profession, where there's a body of knowledge that you need to go out and learn and assimilate and then apply within the business context or within the context that you work in. HR has not previously been seen as a body of knowledge that is worthy, I guess, and so HR and part of the symptom of this, HR had been led by folk that had no knowledge of the, and I'll use the word technical but it might not necessarily apply, the technical aspects of HR. So, I guess there's been a huge ignorance around what HR is and what it could be for the business.	**Yes**
18. Janice	HR Director	Not a profession until we are commercially astute and being understanding of what the business can do to be more efficient, looking at economies of scale, so it needs to be more creative and understand external clients and the whole business more.	**No**
19. Amanda*	HR Manager	Excluded.	
20. Ian*	HR Manager	Excluded.	
21. Robin	HR Consultant	I think it's continually, increasingly, its sort of becoming a fully fledged profession and I say that because over the last thirty years, there's been a tremendous increase in recognition of importance.	**Sort Of**
22. Fiona	HR Director	For a number of colleagues and myself, that has been a problem for quite a few years. We're almost embarrassed to be associated with some HR people because of their level of ability and understanding about the profession.	**No**

* Informed during the interview they were not CIPD qualified