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**HUMAN RESOURCES COMPETENCIES, EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER
SUCCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA: REFLECTIONS OF A SAMPLE OF SENIOR
HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS.**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE DOCTOR OF COMMERCE IN INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY**



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DECLARATION

I, **Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo**, declare that this research thesis on “**Human Resources Competencies, Employability and Career Success in South Africa: Reflections of a Sample Of senior Human Resource Practitioners.**” is a result of my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree purposes or examinations at any other university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete reference. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology** at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus.

I also hereby declare that I am fully aware of the University of Fort Hare’s policy on ethics and copyrights and I have taken every precaution to comply with the regulations. My ethical certificate number is **DOD091SHLA01**


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16 / **04** / 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would love to thank God who makes everything possible in my life. Gratitude extends to the Hlatywayo family who never gave up on me to the end. I acknowledge my wife for all the times you were a single parent as I devoted time to this study. My mother's for your prayers and continued support Thanks to the both of you for your infinite love and support during trying times.

To Richard Dlamini, and Just Design Landscaping and maintenance. Thank you for ensuring I honoured my commitments with the participants. For that I am eternally gratefully.

To Nicole, thank you for being with me through this journey. Professor Chinyamurindi – thank you for your motivation and encouragement and stepping in to ensure the dream is acquired. I am grateful for my mentors' guidance and support in developing me as a student.

The participants who devoted time away from their schedules and did not withdraw – without you the study would not have been possible. Thanks to all of you who agreed to participate.



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DEDICATION

Noluthando and Nashe, this is for you my little girls. In memory of Luthando Hlatywayo, may your soul rest in peace.



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ABSTRACT

Orientation: The research was a reflection on the careers of senior human resources (HR) personnel registered with the SABPP as master or chartered human resources practitioners. The study identified the human resources competencies in South Africa which are attributed to employability and subsequently career success; the study also tested the applicability of the competency model proposed by the SABPP.

Purpose: The study explored human resource competencies, employability and career success in South Africa. It targeted participants registered as master or chartered practitioners with the SABPP. As human resource management is professionalising, there is a need to align the requirements of the profession to what the stakeholders (employers, universities, graduates and professional bodies) require. Without a set baseline for competencies which are instrumental to human resource employability and career success, it becomes challenging to identify human resource shortcomings in the workplace.

Method: The study made use of an interpretive orientation. This interpretivist approach was adopted for two reasons – it could provide useful insight to human resource employability and secondly, to gain insight into the experiences of participants. Purposive sampling was used to solicit participants as the researcher decided to select practitioners registered as master or chartered HR professionals with the SABPP. In the study, 35 practitioner interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and themes were derived from this.

Main findings: The study identified: *Volunteering; Work experience; Internships; Networking; Recommendations; Easy access to job market; Extracurricular activities; Resilience; Research; Having the right qualification; Recruitment agencies; Creativity; Further education; Willingness to learn; Attitude; Work ethic; Equity legislation; Work readiness; Passion for the job; Emotional intelligence; Personality; Positive psychology; Critical thinking; Emotional maturity; Behavioural competencies; Emotional intelligence; Technology; Entrepreneurial orientation; Technology and Entrepreneurial orientation* as the factors which make one employable. *Lack of work experience, Lack of jobs, Expectations of the world of work, Flooded market and No right qualification for HR professionals* were identified as factors which make one unemployable. The competencies which are essential for HR employability and career success were identified. The meaning of career success for human resource practitioners was identified as: *contribution to strategy. Being entrepreneurial, enjoying what one does, support from organisation, mastering HR competencies, income,*

career planning and career were the themes identified to infer the meaning of career success. Areas of dissatisfaction were also identified from practitioners as: *being underutilised; lack of a concise career path; always greener 'on the other side'; monetary dissatisfaction; glass ceiling; and lack of contribution to strategy.*

After the SABPP model had been introduced, it enhanced organisation efficiency and guidance to HR strategy. It was used by practitioners to meet organisation objectives and to set objectives for personal development; however, in some organisations, the model was yet to be implemented and the public sector was putting in place a framework to be in line with the SABPP competency model. Some had no model in place and thus there was no impact on such organisations'.

With regards to the competency model, its applicability to the human resource context and its shortcomings were deliberated upon. Practitioners gave their opinions of the applicability of the SABPP competency model: *Model lays a solid foundation for HR as the Model justifies HR to the boardroom; Model covers all essential HR competencies.* However, the model was also criticised as it was: *too academic, lacked personal characteristics; nothing new here and it is relatively unknown by other practitioners.* Practitioners also identified competencies they regarded as key: these were classified as *traditional, modern and behavioural.* Lastly, practitioners suggested competencies they think must be added into the SABPP competency model: *the human touch; work ethic; love for people, passion for the profession, personality, emotional intelligence, attitude, behavioural competencies, positive psychology and arithmetic numeracy* were identified as key items to be added. Human resource practitioners were content with the state of the model; the general weakness was the omission of personal attributes which are crucial for effective performance within the HR profession.

Contribution: The study is a step towards enhancing sector-specific employability. In attaining employability, the generic skills, which are crucial, have to be cemented by discipline-specific knowledge. Attaining a mark of 65% and above is a reflection of trainability of a job seeker. The meaning of career success is derived from the areas of dissatisfaction and satisfaction of practitioners. HR practitioners value contribution to strategy and are acknowledged for what they are doing. The legal framework in South Africa hinders career progression. There are 12 traits (*networking, positive psychology, interpersonal strength, human touch, work ethic, love for people, passion for the profession, personality, emotional intelligence, arithmetic competency, attitude, behavioural competencies and being*

entrepreneurial) which are essential for effective performance which must be incorporated in the SABPP competency model. From the study, HR must go back to basics, master the basics and in doing so, create a solid foundation for HR ascendancy to the boardroom

Managerial implication

The implications of the study are synonymous to universities and the HR curriculum, the professional body and the future HR professional. HR graduate employability links labour market requirements to higher education. Higher education offers HR degrees for candidates who are willing to work in HR. The study is a contribution to the global professionalisation of human resource management. South Africa is setting the trend as the SABPP is actively involved in the certification of human resource curricula, setting standards and providing a sound code of ethics.

Key words: Human resource competencies, employability, SABPP, career success, South Africa.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEO	chief executive officer
CPD	continuous professional development
HR	human resources
HRM	human resources management
RBV	resource-based view
SABPP	South Africa Board for People Practice
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SHRM	Society for Human Resource Management
TRA	theory of reasoned action
TPB	theory of planned behaviour
USA	United States of America



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Since its inception, the field of human resources management (HRM) has transformed (e.g. Boglind, Hällstén & Thilander, 2011; Hansen, 2002; Heuvel, & Bondarouk, 2016; Ferris, Perrewe, Ranft, Zinko, Stoner, Brouer, & Laird, 2007; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015) as new demands have been placed on human resources (HR) professionals (e.g. Johnson & King, 2002; Koster & Wittek, 2016; Ulrich, 2013; Yeung, Woolcock & Sullivan, 1996). Changes in the role played by HR professionals have placed new demands on them to operate successfully in a changing business environment (Garavan, 2007; Hansen, 2002; Storey, 2014). HR specialists at entry level are routinely criticised for not adding value to organisations as they are not able to meet organisational goals linked to competitiveness (Bentley, 2008; Heneman, 1999; Storey, 2014; Ulrich, 2013). Qualifications in HRM are becoming important to HR careers, as HR professionals heed the call to become strategic partners in their organisation (Guest, 2011; Ulrich, 2013; Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005).

Graduates must be employable (Chavez, Dotong, Camello, & Laguador, 2016; Finch, Peacock, Levallet, & Foster, 2016; Govender, 2008; Helyer, & Lee, 2014; Holmes, 2013; McMurray, Dutton, McQuaid, & Richard, 2016) and have the capabilities to start their own businesses and succeed in their area of choice (Govender, 2008). Graduates are expected to perform efficiently and effectively in the workplace, which places importance on the value of education for enhancing employability (Bennett, 2012; Cade, 2008; Griesel & Parkery, 2009; Jackson, 2012; Jackson, 2013a; Jackson, 2013b; Humburg, van der Velden, & Verhagen, 2013; Paadi, 2014; Robinson, Garton & Vaughn, 2007). Hodges and Burchell (2003) acknowledged competency gaps between the needs of employers and what is provided by tertiary education programmes. Institutions of higher learning should demonstrate superiority by producing marketable graduates (Owen, 2006) as employers search for professionals with degrees who can apply what they have learnt on the job (Hayton *et al.*, 2005).

The degree to which education prepares students for a profession needs to be evaluated as requirements of the work environment differ from what is taught to HR graduates (Cranmer, 2006; Johnson & King, 2002). On the other hand, there is a mismatch between graduate aspirations and the realities of the labour market (Pop & Barkhuzein, 2010; Teijeiro, Rungo & Freire, 2013). This is maintained by Jackson (2013b), who further disputed the development

of employability skills in business undergraduate programmes as graduates fail to adjust to the requirement of employers (Jackson, 2013b; McMurray *et al.*, 2016; Tymon, & Batistic, 2016). This brings into question the relationship between higher education and industry regarding the supply of and demand for HR professionals.

The greater the graduate's educational foundation for a profession, the greater the chances are to succeed within the profession (Jackson, 2013a). This assertion is cemented by Crammer (2006) who identified the growing need to explore whether HR curriculum development must consider employability (Cranmer, 2006) and career success (Cohen, 2015; Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic & Kaiser, 2013; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013). The study sought to reconcile the relationship between the soft and hard skills needed for employability and career success within the HR profession. This chapter addresses the background to the study, problem statement, research questions, objectives, proposition, aims of the study, significance of the study, theoretical framework, and delimitations.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The quality, type, and quantity of graduates produced cannot meet the demands of today's dynamic business environment (Jackson 2013a; Jackson 2013b; Pop & Barkhuzein, 2010). Kaliika and Louw (2012) argued that gaps exist between the outcomes of higher education and what the South African corporate sector requires. Alternatively, there is a prevailing skills deficit and skills mismatch in South Africa (Govender, 2008). Thus, the literature advocates for a skills revolution in the commerce curriculum as the courses offered are too theoretically inclined (Griesel & Parkery 2009; Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Litheko, 2013).

Lecturers are criticised for their lack of business experience, and graduates for the lack of basic entrepreneurial skills (Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Kaliika & Louw 2012; York & Knight, 2006). Lecturers who are unaware of daily organisational challenges, from an HR perspective, may find it difficult to teach as pointed out by Jackson (2013a), Paadi (2014), and Schreuder (2001). Quek (2005) highlighted the need to consider a way of training learners to develop generic competencies to enable the graduates to transfer learning to meet workplace demands.

The dynamic, highly volatile nature of globalisation places new demands on HR professionals. Changes in the world of work have given rise to the need for new roles for practitioners, and in turn, this has led to the development of new and varied competencies (see Chapter 2). For example, HR professionals need both analytical and people skills so that they effectively add value to organisations (Heneman, 1999; Storey, 2014; Ulrich, 2013). HR professionals must

be equipped to face the new challenges faced in the field. These competencies must be identified and communicated to graduates because when graduates are better informed of the skills required by employers, it helps them to be more prepared for employment as they develop their work-readiness skills (Raftopolous, Coetzee & Visser, 2009).

The goal of a curriculum should be to equip learners with skills needed to undertake value-adding activities (Chang, & Hsu, 2010) relating to the competencies required by employers. Traditionally, conflict exists between academics and employers as alluded to by Bhanugopan and Fish (2009); the conflict is centred on the designing, teaching, and usefulness of graduates in the place of work. For higher education to be effective, curricula must be reinforced by the process of ideology, philosophy, and epistemologies of knowledge and learning (Taylor, 2008). Most failures are caused by the changing of curricula without proper training and communication (Taylor, 2008). In the development of the curriculum, little attention is paid to the learning process and those skills that lead to effective performance (Schreuder, 2001; Paadi, 2014).

Essential competencies such as general business management are not covered by several educational programmes and organisations expect HR practitioners to perform as strategic business partners to assist in the achievement of organisational goals (Johnson & King, 2002). The HR needs of South Africa are often not served due to persistent inequalities (Soko & Balchin, 2014), and this is aggravated by distrust and unhealthy competition between institutions of higher learning. Little cooperation and resource sharing are the remaining problems facing both advantaged and disadvantaged institutions (Chipunza, & Gwarinda, 2010; Odhav 2009). This problem has led to a wasteful system that is not serving human resources needs of South Africa (Odhav, 2009). On 10 May 2012, the South African Board for People Practice (SABPP) introduced a new model of the ideal competencies for HR practitioners (see Chapter 3). The extent to which these competencies have been incorporated into the HR curriculum to ensure that the graduate is well equipped to face the working environment challenges has not yet been explored.

When graduates have mastered the basics of the profession, the next step would be to progress within their career choice. However, this transition is increasingly uncertain. Baruch (2006) admitted that careers have become unpredictable, vulnerable, and multidirectional in the current environment. From this, it can be observed that globalisation has affected employability, as its definition now extends to cover career success (Baruch, 2006; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Varshne, 2013). Evidence offers the view that career mobility is the

responsibility of the job incumbent. For this reason, HR competencies can be used by graduates in the managing of their career mobility.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the discussion above, the following research questions were formulated:

*What are the human resources competencies needed for employability and career success?
and*

*How do human resources practitioners evaluate the SABPP competency model concerning
their work within the South African context?*

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study had the following primary and secondary objectives:

Primary objective

- Identify the human resources competencies needed for employability and career success amongst HR practitioners in South Africa.

Secondary objective

- Evaluate the SABPP competency model concerning the work of HR practitioners within a South African context.



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1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

This study sought to identify the knowledge, desirable attitudes and skills to embark on the career path to a successful HR professional. Thus, findings from the study were adopted to reconcile the demands of organisations, the state, and HR professional bodies. Competent HR practitioners' competencies were deconstructed to identify competencies required in the HR profession for employability and career success. The competencies which practitioners possess were identified to inform an ideal HR syllabus.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Attributes required by potential employers must be integrated into the curriculum so as to make university training relevant (Bridgstock, 2009; Ilic, 2007; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011; McCowan, 2014; Robles, 2012; Spaull, 2013; Taylor, &

Govendor, 2017). In summary, therefore, education should serve as a foundation for future career prospects (Crawford, Gregg, Macmillan, Vignoles, & Wyness, 2016; Nudelman, Otto, & Dalbert, 2016; Waaijer, 2016; Weijden, Teelken, Boer, & Drost, 2016), rather than reproduce labour power.

Employers seek individuals who have mastered a body of knowledge (Friedman & Kass, 2017; Hayton *et al.*, 2005; Long 2008), which comes after familiarising themselves with the concepts, language, logic and practices of HR as a result of research and training (Hayton *et al.*, 2005; Hollenbeck, DeRue, & Guzzo, 2004; Long 2008; Tharenou, Saks, & Moore, 2007; Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005). Although employers have specific requirements, they are seldom involved in curriculum. Instead, Taylor (2008) mentioned that discussions on a change in curricula tend to involve a small number of individuals (for example, senior academic staff and government officials).

The disjuncture between employers' needs and university supply is evident in the HR function. More so because of the rapid pace of transformation in the field. The HR function has seen radical and ongoing changes since the industrial revolution, transforming from its traditional role to being a strategic business partner (Bentley, 2008; Heneman, 1999; Oltra, 2005; Olalla, 1991; Storey, 2014; Ulrich, 2013). Professionals have failed to keep pace with these changes as noted by Ramlall, (2006), supporting Yeung *et al.* (1996) findings that that only 10-35% of HR professionals possessed the new set of required competencies. Ahmad, Kausar, and Azhar, (2015) further identified the lack of competencies which in turn negatively impacts HR effectiveness.

There is thus a need to ensure that HR professionals are well equipped by creating a knowledge pool within universities that can be used to produce competent professionals. The rationale behind this research was to investigate the ideal HR graduate profile. The study therefore deliberated on issues relating to HR employability which speaks to the competencies HR graduates must have at entry level into the profession. The modern need for HR to be included in the boardroom motivated the researcher to investigate whether enough has been done in education to ensure HR can fill the new roles required in the modern industry.

In South Africa there are only a few empirical studies that explain the foundation, the concepts of employability and career success (Bezuidenhout, 2011; Coetzee, 2017; Taylor & Govender, 2017) and the meaning of the terms is somehow lost as they are used interchangeably. This research looked into these concepts concerning HR professionals. Previous studies only identified the problem of universities not producing work-ready graduates: the lack of sector-

specific employability (Jackson 2013a; Jackson 2013b; Kaliika & Louw, 2012; Pop & Barkhuzein, 2010).

The changes that are taking place in the world of work in HR are not being effected on the supply side. In South Africa, there is no universally agreed upon curriculum and universities adopt their own HR syllabi; thus student output from the university cannot be audited.

The study sought to fill the gap that exists between industry, state and professional bodies in the supply of competent HR practitioners (Bennett, 2012; Cranmer, 2006; Jackson, 2013a; Jackson, 2013b; Johnson & King, 2002; Paadi, 2014). There is a gap in literature within the South African context in respect to the presence of HR competencies in the curriculum. The SABPP can use the findings of the study as a benchmark for quality assurance and certifications of HR related programmes.

This study offers a solution and results will deal with the HR-specific context. The proposed model for competencies set by the SABPP is yet to be tested; this study seeks to cement the relevance of the competency model to the South African context. The findings of the study are of practical significance to curriculum developers and can be used as a means of auditing student output. Findings will also aid in the evaluation of training and training needs analysis. The cost of recruitment will be reduced as less time will be spent on induction training.

Previous studies have only identified the problem, which is universal and does not speak to a specific sector (Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Quek, 2005). This study offers a solution to the problem of raw graduates from universities, specifically in the HR context, who lack the hard and soft skills required in the profession. No similar study has been conducted. Thus, findings can be used as a benchmark for other sectors. It is envisaged that this research will be able to recommend modules that must be included to devise an ideal HR curriculum that suits the South African labour market. The research is expected to add significant value for institutions of higher learning and the professional HR body by aligning outcomes of higher education and the direction the HR profession is taking. Recommendations of significant value will be made to HR candidates willing to pursue a career in human resource management and to organisations. There is likely to be less training at entry level as the graduates produced will be well equipped with an ideal HR curriculum.

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section discusses the theories adopted in the study and how they are relevant. The previous sections touched on the constructs under review.

1.7.1 The resource-based view of the firm

The challenge that the field of HR faces is that the value of the field can only be reflected on the balance sheet with difficulty (Bentley, 2008; Heneman, 1999; Olalla, 1991; Storey, 2014; Ulrich, 2013). Thus, there is a need to explore what must be done by HR professionals to ensure that the roles they play in the organisation are not played by anyone else to ensure that they are not replaced and remain relevant. Dunford, Snell, and Wright (2001) cited Wright *et al.* (1994) who argued that HR practices could be easily copied by competitors, leading to HR practices not being a basis for competitive advantage when they have applied the concept of a value resource inimitability organisation (VRIO). They proposed that a highly skilled and motivated workforce have a greater potential to constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage. They proposed that the human capital pool (a highly skilled and highly motivated workforce) has greater potential to constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage.

HR is considered an intangible resource by the resource-based view (RBV) as it includes attributes such knowledge, skill, know-how, and talent which can constitute a firm's competitive advantage (Gheshmi *et al.*, 2011; Parry, 2011; Olalla, 1991; Dunford, Snell & Wright, 2001). The RBV highlighted a new point of view in strategic management, including intellectual capital, among other fields (Olalla, 1991; Galbreth, 2005; Wernerfelt 1984). Akio (2005; p. 126) noted how scholars made investigations using the RBV:

- Hamel and Praharad, (1994) with the concept of “core competence”;
- Barney, (2002) with the “Value, Resource Imitability Organisation framework”;
- Teece, Pisano and Shuen, (1997) “dynamic capability”;
- Nelson and Winter, (1982) “routine and skills”.

The RBV was used in this study as it demonstrates how HR can contribute to a firm's sustainable competitive advantage. Those pursuing a career in HR, can make meaningful contributions to their organisations when they have mastered the core components of the profession. The RBV builds on the work of Penrose (1959) who assumed that firms could be thought of as bundles of productive resources and these differ according to firms. That is to say, a firm's resources are heterogeneous. Selznick (1957) and Ricardo (1966) were seen as supporters of RBV as they viewed resources of a firm as immobile and hard to copy as a result of inelastic supply (Ferreira, Azevedo & Fernández, 2011). Wernerfelt, (1984) is seen as the

key architect of the theory (Olalla, 1991; Galbreth, 2005) and defined a resource as anything that could be thought of as strength or a weakness of a given firm.

Resources are assets or capabilities (Galbreth, 2005; Anderson & Kheam 1998). Assets are tangible or intangible and controlled by a firm (Olalla, 1991; Galbreth, 2005; Anderson & Kheam 1998). Capabilities are intangible bundles of skills and accumulated knowledge exercised within an organisation's routine (Anderson & Kheam 1998; Collins 1994; Galbreth, 2005; Nelson & Winter 1982; Nyberg, Moliterno, Hale & Lepak, 2014; Teece *et al.*, 1997).

The core competency concept was popularised by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) within strategic literature in Dunford, Snell, and Wright, (2001). Anderson and Kheam (1998) cited Hall (1993) who classified intangible assets as competencies. Hall (1993) went on to relate intangible assets or competencies to capabilities which included a functional capability (know-how) and cultural or organisational capability (routines). Capability refers to joint resources to produce work or activity (Nyberg *et al.*, 2014; Olalla, 1991). The concept of core competencies is defined as collective learning within an organisation, regarding how to coordinate diverse production skills and integrate different types of technologies.

Priem *et al.* (2001) criticised the RBV, as it defines resources regarding performance outcomes that are not empirically testable (Tyawoniak, 2007). However, Barney (2001) counter-argued that the RBV variables such as value, rarity and inimitability can be empirically tested. The RBV states that a firm's internal resources are essential as they may be effective for a firm to attain competitive advantage, according to Lado and Wilson (1984) as cited by Olalla (1991). If the resources are scarce, valuable, non-replicable, difficult to transfer and specific, it means they are strategic. This is only possible when firms implement and support the resource (Olalla, 1991).

The resource-based theory has made it possible to mark the importance of HR for an enterprise because of its capacity to create competitive advantage (Olalla, 1991). Lado and Wilson (1984) supported that HR practices could be a source of competitive advantage as they suggested that HR systems could enhance a firm's competitive advantage as they are not imitable (Dunford, Snell, & Wright 2001; Olalla, 1991).

The RBV provides the framework from which HR researchers and practitioners can better understand the challenges of strategy, and thus be better able to play a positive role in the strategic management of firms (Dunford, Snell & Wright, 2001). The field of HR wants to

become a strategic business partner. Accordingly, there is a need to explore the use of the RBV as a measure to ensure that HR professionals are competent, and are capable of driving the field to its goal (Barnes & Adam, 2017; Garavan, Shanahan, Carbery, & Watson, 2016).

The RBV was adopted for the study as it not only aimed to identify the specific knowledge that is required from HR professionals but the same theory was used to identify the required competencies for HR practitioners.

1.7.2 The functionalist perspective on education

Historically, education is seen as a means of individual achievement and as a solution to societal problems (Bilton *et al.*, 2002). Thus, education should be equally and fairly distributed among the members of society and should prepare students for active roles in the future. Universities need to be more innovative and responsive to the needs of a globally competitive knowledge economy and the challenging labour market requirements for advanced human capital (Taylor, 2008). Parsons (1973) identified higher education as the most critical feature of the developing structure of modern societies. Education theory was adopted as it justifies how through socialisation in the schooling system, graduates acquire competencies. The role of education is to equip graduates with the essential competencies for employability. Academic qualifications are utilising assessment as a mode of evaluation. Testing serves as a means of determining whether learning objectives have been attained. Education uses testing and performance as they are inseparable components in education (Klett, 2010).

According to Turner (1993), the role of education in society in Europe is to reproduce labour power and in America higher education was seen as extended to the general populous. Competition between nations has intensified as governments see education and training as the key to national and economic growth (Haralambos, Holborn & Heald 2008).

Parsons viewed university education as a prerequisite for participation in the social system (Turner, 1993). This approach was adopted as the foundation of the functionalist perspective which acknowledges that education is important for the attainment of occupations in the modern world. Education plays three main roles in society, namely socialisation, skills provision and role allocation (Parsons, 1951; Mecer & Covey, 1980; Haralambos *et al.*, 2008). Functionalists contend that education tends to focus on the positive contributions, for example that education maintains the social system. Education rewards the most talented individuals

with high qualifications (meritocracy). Education presents further benefits as it promotes a national identity and strengthens the social solidarity of a nation (Parsons, 1951).

The functionalist view of education argues that education is meritocratic as it selects and sorts learners by their abilities and talents as opposed to ascribed characteristics (Parsons, 1966; Mecer & Covey, 1980). This approach was adopted as this perspective categorises people according to their talents through the use of examinations and qualifications. The approach gives individuals the opportunity to succeed in society through capitalising on their merit and ability. Functionalists proffer that the examination system grounds the education system and thus qualified members of a discipline must occupy positions based on merit.

1.7.3 Conflict theory

In contrast to the functionalist perspective which is based on merit, the conflict perspective is grounded on background. Collins (1971) cemented Marx and Weber's sentiments on how educational qualifications are used as a resource in people's careers. Collins (1971) found that employers tend to hire people from the same background as theirs. The highly educated set up job requirements that support them, and employers favour them. Education maintains power, justifies privilege and legitimises wealth of the ruling class (Birnbaum, 1969). Marxian mode assumes that education is solely a reflection of the ruling class's interests. Conflict theorists contend that learners from schools with resources (predominantly White) are more advantaged than those in disadvantaged schools.

In the workplace, workers are controlled by the extent to which they do not put their knowledge into practice (Birnbaum, 1969; Collins (1971). Conflict theorists do not agree with functionalists on the notion that education produces equal opportunities for all in the workplace and contend that those with a background of resources are likely to be better placed regardless of their abilities. They obtain higher qualifications and more rewarding jobs. Those that are denied do not blame the system that has condemned them to failure but are socialised into believing that they have themselves to blame. Education reproduces inequality by justifying privilege and attributing poverty to personal failure (Birnbaum, 1969; Bilton *et al.*, 2002; Collins 1971; Haralambos *et al.*, 2008 Mercer & Covey, 1980).

1.7.4 Theory synthesis

To understand and answer the research questions about HR employability and career success, the RBV, functionalist perspective and conflict perspective were adopted. These theories were

adopted as the RBV justifies the need for HR competencies and identifies the essential knowledge skills and abilities for effective performance within the HR profession. Historically, education is seen as a means of individual achievement and as a solution to societal problems (Bilton *et al.*, 2002). Thus, education should be equally and fairly distributed among the members of society and should prepare students for active roles in the future. Universities need to be more innovative and responsive to the needs of a globally competitive knowledge economy and the challenging labour market requirements for advanced human capital (Taylor, 2008).

In the case of the South African environment, the conflict and functionalist perspective offers insight into defining employability. Knowledge acquisition comes from classroom training when blended with the human resources management world of work. Such a blended system will offer a revised and challenging curriculum, thus better preparing learners to contribute to the professionalisation of HR.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach is defined by Hale (2009) as a system of inquiry which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, Babbie (2010) also subscribed to the definition of qualitative methodology by arguing that qualitative research tends to be associated with the idea that social life is the product of social interaction, relationships and actions that characterise the social world. This study made use of the interpretivist paradigm also called the social constructivist research paradigm. It is a sociological theory of knowledge that applies the general philosophical constructivism into the social. It is a theory that states that the individual's learning takes place because of their interaction with others or in group (Shwandt, 2007; Creswell 2009). The goal of this paradigm is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. Creswell (2009) stated that the more open-ended the questions, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people do or say in their social life setting. The paradigm uses interviews during which participants can provide their views of the topic under study (Creswell, 2009).

1.8.1 Research design

Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell (2006) argued that a research design is the planning of how the data is collected and analysed. In this regard, this study adopted a qualitative research design.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a qualitative research design is based on a situated activity which studies things in their natural settings, in an attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them. More so, qualitative research design focuses on description and interpretation and might lead to the development of new concepts or theories, or to an evaluation of an organisational process (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2007). Precisely, qualitative research is concerned with the qualitative phenomenon.

For this research, only open-ended questions were used. In Creswell (2009), this worldview is suitable for this study because the researcher is able to obtain the views of the situation they live in. This worldview uses multi-participant meaning which is derived from the experiences of the participants.

1.8.2 Research population

According to De-Vos (2005), a population is a set of entities where all the measurements of interest to the researcher are represented. Bryman, (2012, p. 714) defined a population as ‘a universe of units from which a sample is to be selected.’ This study focused on the current population of senior HR practitioners in South Africa registered with the SABPP as master or chartered practitioners.



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1.8.3 Sample and sampling method

The research used purposive sampling. This method means selecting participants according to the selected criteria relevant to the particular research question (Maree, 2012). The sample size may or may not be fixed prior to data collection and very often depends on the resources available to the researcher. This type of sampling may have its flaws as it may result in data not being saturated. To counter the flaw, the sample size must be predetermined on the basis of theoretical saturation. Purposive sampling is most successful when data reviews and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection (Babbie, Motoun, Vorster & Prozesky, 2015; Bryman, 2012; Maree, 2012). The researcher sampled 35 senior HR practitioners in South Africa registered with the SABPP as master or chartered practitioners who were purposively selected. Each interview with these selected participants took at least 45 to 90 minutes.

The units of analysis were selected by means of purposive sampling. According to Flick (2007), purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher to choose samples that contain the most relevant characteristics or typical attributes of the population. In this study, the key determinants were the senior HR practitioners in South Africa registered with the

SABPP as master or chartered practitioners. The advantage of purposive sampling is that it increases the likelihood of variability common in any social phenomena to be presented in the data (Creswell, 2009). This helps to ensure consistency in collected data as well as reducing bias.

1.8.4 Data collection

Semi-structured qualitative interviews with senior HR practitioners in South Africa registered with the SABPP as master or chartered practitioners were the key tool for data collection. By using semi-structured interviews, each informant was asked a set of questions. Semi-structured interviews are based on an interview guide that provides a list of questions and topics that have to be covered (Flick, 2007). As such, the interviewer covered each topic by making use of open-ended questions and probes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017). Topics were derived from the research objectives and questions.

The advantage of making use of semi-structured interviews is that they are flexible and the interviewer can modify the order and details of how topics are covered (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). More so, in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed the collection of more extensive and detailed data from the participants through enabling them to air their views and experiences in an expended manner by means of probes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017). This means that some control can be ceded to the informant on how the interview proceeds. Since participants were asked similar questions, it was possible for the researcher to make comparisons across interviews.

1.8.5 Data analysis

According to Mouton (2001, p. 108-109), “data analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships.” In this way, the collected data was operationalised and given meaning. The researcher generated the themes by coding in which gathered data were grouped into broad and specific categories. Broad categories were determined by the research question and purpose of the research probes (Bertram & Christiansen, 2017). Specific categories were developed from detailed examination of data and identification of frequent or significant themes. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and labels were assigned to categories in order to identify their content and meaning. Details relating to this are discussed in Chapter 5.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As the participants of the research were human, it was seen as essential to understanding the basic ethics of research. Participants were informed of the purpose, risks and benefits of involvement in the study. Participants were also informed of the alternatives to participation. No social, psychological and financial harm could be incurred by the research participants (Polonsi, 2004). Data collected from the study was strictly for academic purposes. The American Psychology Association (APA) ethical principles cover a diverse range of research issues. Privacy, confidentiality, and acknowledgment of sources were maintained as stipulated in Section 4 of the APA code (American Psychology Association code of ethics, 2011).

An application to conduct research was completed by the researcher and was reviewed by the University of Fort Hare Ethics Committee before the research was undertaken. An ethical clearance certificate was issued to the researcher with ethical clearance number **DOD091SHLA01**. Thus all ethical issues were considered and appropriately addressed.

1.10 THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter 1 provides the background of the study including the problem that led to the research. The chapter further includes the problem statement, the significance and the objectives and the hypotheses of the proposed study. **Chapter 2** is a literature review and gives an in-depth overview of the HR context. **Chapter 3** describes career success, and employability. **Chapter 4** presents the research design and technique adopted. Reasons for the interpretive approach and the benefits are given. **Chapter 5** focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the research results. **Chapter 6** offers a discussion on the findings. **Chapter 7** presents the shortcomings of the study, the managerial implications and conclusion. **Chapter 8** provides the researcher's reflection on the PhD.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW- THE STATE OF HR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a background of HR as a discipline and moves to how it became a profession globally and in South Africa. To note, the history of the professional body in South Africa, the SABPP, is not well documented as there is scant literature which justifies the presence of the professional body since its inception (van Rensburg, 2009). In South Africa there are few studies (van Rensburg, 2009; van Rensburg, Basson & Carrim, 2011) which outline the development of the SABPP. The rest of the information is found in reports and policy documents for the professional body (SABPP) and from the South African qualifications authority. The chapter provides an overview of the HR journey globally and locally. The chapter also deliberates on the HR conundrum (soft HR vs strategic HR) so as to enlighten on the paradigm shift. Challenges of HR are identified followed by the competencies and competency modelling within HR. Competencies and competency modelling are elucidated upon as the researcher drives towards setting the arguments around HR employability and career success.



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2.2 WHY HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT?

In seeking to answer the research question, there is need to give an overview of the state and development of HR globally and in South Africa. There is no debate about the changes which have transpired and alterations which have emerged in the world of work. These directions influence the workplace and have shaped and are continuously shaping the direction HR is taking. In order for HR to continuously adapt and not only cope, but set the trends for the direction, it needs to follow and there is a need to develop a framework which develops the ideal candidate.

As HR in the current economy is taking a strategic orientation (Chow, Teo, & Chew, 2013; Lazarova, Peretz, & Fried, 2017; Marler, & Parry, 2016), there is a need to explore the journey HR has taken and is taking. Changes which are taking place under globalisation have forced organisations to review the HR argument (Ungerer, Herholdt & Uys, 2009). HR is essential in South African organisations not only as a support function but because of the inherent role it plays within organisations (Meyer, 2014; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2016; van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). Aggarwal and

D'Souza, (2012) alleged that HR practices are an essential aspect of organisational culture in retaining professionally qualified employees. HR departments have a role to play in handling the challenges which arise in the workplace (Schultz, 2010).

2.2.1 Defining HRM

Selmer and Chiu (2004; p. 324) defined HRM as the science and the practice that deals with the nature of the employment relationship and all of the decisions, actions, and issues that relate to that relationship. In practice, HRM involves an organisation's acquisition, development, and utilisation of employees, as well as the employees' relationship to an organisation and its performance. In defining HR, Ulrich (1998, p. 29) disputed that '*HR should not be defined by what it does but by what it delivers – results that enrich the organisation's value to customers, investors and employees*'. Nel et al. (2015; p. 4) referred to HRM as the development and application of policies, systems, practices and procedures that direct the thinking attitudes and behaviour of people in the organisation towards performance to support the vision, short and long-term objectives of an organisation and at the same time satisfying personal needs.

It can be noted that the HR function is not limited within organisations (managers and support staff) but also creates value for investors and customers externally (Schute, Barkhuizen, & Van der Sluis, 2015). From the above definition, it can be observed that the mandate for HR is broad and complex, thus challenging. This is because HR practitioners must satisfy the needs of the stakeholders in the employment relationship, the consumers of the organisation's products, and at the same time address societal injustices. The definition also justifies the role of competent HR practitioners and identifies the direction (strategy) which the practice is taking. In South Africa, the development of HR practices was ranked poorly by investors and external customers (Schute *et al.*, 2015). In South Africa, organisations cannot afford to omit the HR function. There is, therefore, a need for professional credibility (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011).

2.2.2 The HR journey

The origins, growth, and development of HR can be traced to America (Grobler *et al.*, 2015). McKee (1997) shared the HR journey as it has transitioned through numerous paradigms: *the mechanistic period* (manufacturing as the driver of American industry); *legalistic period* (growing of social and employment regulation regulating the workplace); *organic* (mergers, downsizing, restructuring which was a conducive environment for HR to thrive); and *strategic period* (strategic thinking and planning).

In India, Srimannarayana, (2013) stated that HR began in the 1930s and it was mainly *clerical*. In the period 1940-60, the quest to be *recognised as a profession* began. The 1970-80s attempted to *regulate HR by introducing standards and conformance*. By the 1990s, the focus was on *productivity and human values* which was termed as a promising phase for the profession. From 2000 onwards, *strategy and organisation performance* became the focus. HR has a history which is long and humble. Currently the journey is both positive and challenging, and the future has opportunities and challenges which are thought-provoking for the HR profession.

Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) in their study posited that HR has undergone four phases (four waves), as illustrated in Figure 2.1. HR started with the administrative wave (*HR continuing traditional administrative functions, delivering HR services, and working on regulatory compliance*); to the HR practices wave (*hiring, training, career management, compensation or rewards, communication, and organisation, policies, organisation design, work processes*); to the HR strategy wave (*HR extends its role beyond administrative activities to business strategy*) and then the HR and context wave (*connecting HR to the broader business context in which business operates*)

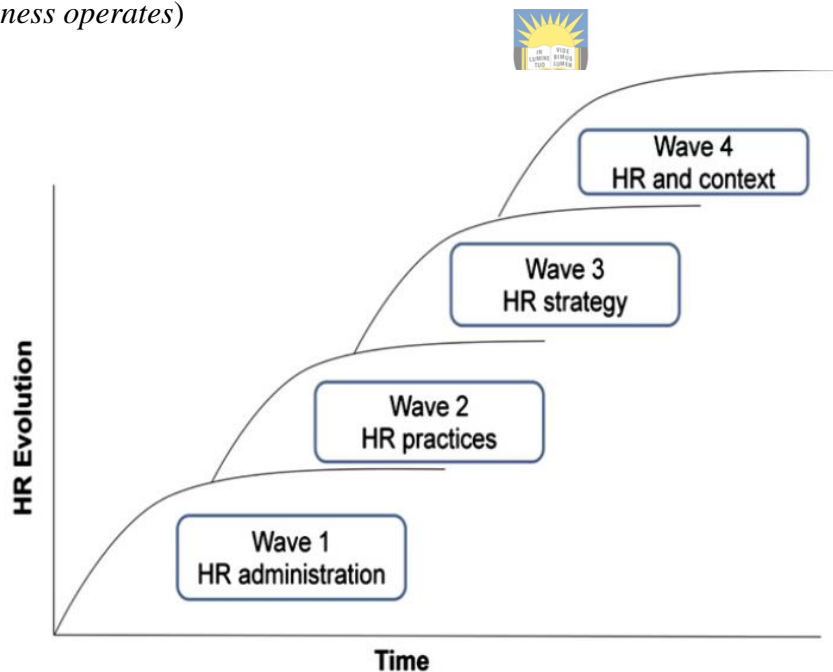


Figure 2.1: HR evolution

Source: Adopted from Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015;190)

Kaufman (1999) identified the roots of HR to be in the era of scientific management. In the past century, human resource management has not only been changing but the name has also

been shifting from personnel management or administration to people management (van Aswegen, 2013), thus aligning itself to the current trends. Armstrong (2009) shared the same sentiment of the shift from ‘personnel management’ to ‘human resource management’ which has required treating people as a key resource since 1980. The role of HR has been elevated from clerical to administrative, administrative to managerial, managerial to executive, and executive to strategic partner (Budhwar, 2009).

Of great interest in the development of HR is the synergy from the origins to the current state in a developing and developed world context. This historical development is crucial as it supports the need for “competencies” to take the forefront, as HR will require personnel who are well equipped to steer it in the right direction. The literature has illustrated the migratory pattern of HR from clerical to administrative, administrative to managerial, managerial to executive, and executive to a strategic partner (Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2016; Grobler *et al.*, 2015; McKee, 1997; Meyer, 2014; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Srimannarayana, 2013; Ungerer, Herholdt & Uys, *et al.*, 2009).

In exploring the HR journey, Boudreau (2014) deplored the slow pace of change within the profession; in relation to the challenges HR is facing in comparison to the rapid economic, social, political and organisational change. To add to this, those who work within the profession seem comfortable with the role and progress HR has made. Unfortunately, most organisations have not fundamentally redesigned or redirected their HR organisations (Boudreau 2014; Cohen, 2015). This reluctance by some organisations in adopting HR as a strategic tool is a justification for the slow pace of progress. HR is still viewed as essentially an administrative function (Cohen, 2015). There can be several factors that can be attributed to this. One of the challenges identified by Selmer and Chiu (2004) and Balthazard, (2014) is the lack of formal advanced discipline-specific training for HR managers.

Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) noted the changes that have taken place in HR and have categorised them into three categories. Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) stated that HR evolved from the administrative wave of HR to the HR practices wave and then to the HR strategy wave. In the administrative wave, HR focused on traditional administrative functions, delivering HR services. The HR practices wave relates to innovation in HR practices in people (hiring, training, career management), compensation or rewards, communication, and organisation (policies, organisation design, work processes). The HR strategy wave refers to being aligned to the business strategy. The role of HR in the organisation is predicted to change

completely within a decade. HR professionals are expected to be business partners in their respective organisations. There is insufficient literature which documents the need for HR's evolution to full participation in the boardroom. As eluded to by Selmer and Chiu (2004), there are very few major studies on HR competencies. HR's strategic role is transforming to include intellectual, organisational performance, and human capital development, leading the changes as the former areas of specialisation evolve in constant change.

In spite of the strides which HR has made, till today not all organisations respect HR and see the value of HR (McKee, 1997). In some organisations HR is outsourced, or alternatively downsized when spared. The HR department in most organisations is regarded as a low priority area (Barney & Wright, 1998; Sandholtz & Burrows, 2016). As stated, the role of HR in the organisation is predicted to change completely within a decade. HR professionals are expected to be business partners in their respective organisations (Cohen, 2015; Ulrich, 1998; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). This can be attained when organisations accept that HR must change from emphasising its traditional roles to being more proactive and to have strategic alliances and probably a more strategic role in the organisations (Srimannarayana, 2013).

Like most developing states, in South Africa, the development of HR as an academic discipline can be linked to the development of Industrial Psychology. The researcher opted to assess Industrial Psychology curricula as they cover HR content (recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, motivation, and leadership, etc) and overlaps between the two fields (HR and Industrial Psychology). Industrial Psychology's development as a science began in the United States of America as early as 1527 (Schreuder 2001), and momentum grew after the First World War. During this period, recruitment of army recruits took centre stage. In the 1980s, Industrial Psychology grew from the traditional approaches (selection, performance appraisal, motivation, and leadership) to encompass personality, ethics group research, among others (Schreuder 2001; Schreuder, & Coetzee, 2010). Industrial Psychology research came into its own in South Africa with the establishment of the National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR) in 1946 (Schreuder, 2001). Schreuder (2001) professed that the establishment of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 1969 made a significant contribution to the development of Industrial Psychology in South Africa (Schreuder, & Coetzee, 2010).

Industrial psychologists have also been instrumental in the establishment of human resource management practices, policies and system (Schreuder, 2001; 3). Van Rensburg et al. (2011;13) assessed the state of HR in South Africa to have international status and recognition;

to be an established body of knowledge; to possess a regulatory body with a track record of stability that is recognised under the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act; heraldic registration; formal registration processes; a career path that provides for entry at various levels; registration levels with detailed competency criteria; post nominal titles for registration levels a modern and workable code of conduct; disciplinary policies and procedures for deregistration; an electronic continuous professional development (CPD) process to keep professionals current; an accredited quality assurance process; and the will to regulate itself.

2.3 THE HR CONUNDRUM

Deadrick and Gibson (2009) in Cohen (2015) pointed out the gap between what HR academics cover and what HR practitioners show concern about. The HR profession had weak standards of entry (Tepp, 2007); there were no distinguishable attributes for one to enter the profession. There were no barriers for entry to the HR profession, which resulted in practitioners possessing a variety of skills, behaviours and preferences. This presented a challenge for HR. Nowadays, HR is no longer considered a job that just anyone can do. HR is under review in many countries as it is regarded as a profession. There is agreement among scholars who value the modern role of human resources (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). Most of the studies conducted regarding HR competencies, the development of HR, and the strategic nature of HR have been motivated by the developments in the United States of America (USA) (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014).

Boudreau (2014; 191) cited a 2014 survey by Deloitte. Over 2000 business and HR leaders in 94 countries participated. They found that HR and talent executives grade themselves a C-minus for overall performance. Only 35% of HR leaders rated their HR organisation's overall readiness "good" or "excellent". This prompted the researchers to suggest HR operates with a grade of C-minus on a scale from A to F. Cohen (2015) identified the divide within the HR profession as some executives see themselves as more superior to other HR professionals. This divide is furthered by researchers who only tend to focus on executive ranks and larger organisations.

The strategic role of HR has to be transformed to focus on organisational performance, intellectual and human capital development, leading the changes as the former five areas evolve in constant change. Boudreau (2014) observed the lack of evidence regarding HR's constituents in that they are demanding better to achieve more than the status quo. Boudreau (2014)

criticised the lack of seriousness and local complacency which are the biggest threats to the necessary change for HR leaders and their profession to address the coming challenges. However, in attributing credit where it is due, Boudreau (2014) identified an isolated small group of elite organisations which use advanced technology, big data, and aspects relating to emerging issues such as globalisation and sustainability. These organisations aim to address HR functional practices, not organisational dilemmas. Boudreau (2014; 191) verified in a comprehensive longitudinal study at the Center for Effective Organisations from 1995 to 2013:

- *There was a sentiment that more than 80 percent of HR professionals do not have the skills they need to be effective as indicated by respondents.*
- *HR skill satisfaction averages are below “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” for all HR skills except those in traditional areas (HR technical skills and interpersonal dynamics).*
- *The business partner skills of the HR professionals are rated moderate to low.*
- *The effectiveness of HR is rated moderate overall, and highest in traditional areas such as providing HR services and being an employee advocate, while lower in areas related to business strategy.*
- *There has been little improvement in many arenas that are strongly correlated with HR’s role in strategy and HR functional effectiveness.*



The challenge for HR is that, within some organisations, HR is not being recognised as a core business function. To add to the conundrum, HR is not only seen as a support function but those who lead in HR are criticised for not running the show, and some even lack HR qualifications or background. Magau and Roodt (2010), in their literature review, stated that HR’s contribution to strategy has been met with positive and negative sentiments from line managers (Lawler & Boudreau, 2009).

HRM is becoming a critical factor for business in the 21st century as it impacts on business performance by 10% (Cohen, 2015). The HR role is moving from traditional administrator to HR business partner (Angrave *et al.*, 2016; Ulrich and Dulebohn 2015). The greatest challenge to practitioners is the echo from boardroom members that HR practitioners are poorly equipped regarding strategic aspects (Selmer & Chiu, 2004; Sheehan, Holland & De Cieri, 2006).

However, for organisations to survive, remain competitive, sustain their business functions and grow in an ever-changing and competitive environment, HR practices as endorsed by Papulova and Papulova (2006) have become an increasingly important means for an improved business approach. Effective HR practices correlate with employee attitudes (Park, Gardner & Wright 2004).

HR professionals assume demanding and complex duties in organisations (Van Aswegen *et al.*, 2009). HR practitioners agree on the concern for professional competence and own knowledge within HR and view it as imperative (Meyer, 2014; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2016; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). There is a consensus in the literature on the added responsibilities for HR professionals (Selmer, & Chiu, 2004; Brewster, Farndale, & van Ommeren, (2000). Further, Johnson and King (2002) claimed that there is consensus from practitioners and scholars on the changes that have taken place in the HR agenda. Strategic business management and organisational effectiveness are all areas in which strategic human resource management plays an important role (Pietersen, & Engelbrecht, 2005).

HR professionals face several challenges including the potential narrowing of their career base; the need for improved HRM metrics; and a broader commitment to attraction and retention initiatives (Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) noted that the greatest danger facing HR, as noted by HR executives, is forgetting the basics (traditional HR) and not executing the basics well. Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) identified rapid change, workforce diversity, skill shortages, downsizing, technology, and outsourcing as the common challenges facing HR and they noted the lack of literature to matters HR professionals see as challenging. Boudreau (2014) identified that the gaps within HR which make it fall short of its mandate are not isolated, but vary with regard to industry experience and organisational strategy. The identified gaps which HR professionals lack include globalisation, strategic uncertainty, agility, leadership, personalisation, and alternatives to traditional employment.

In South Africa, due to its history of oppression and inequality, HR practitioners face unique challenges in the workplace. Abbott, Goosen and Coetzee (2013) alluded to the fact that little attention is paid to HR and development. HR practitioners have been advised to be more proactive so that they are better able to fulfill their mandate to work for the success of their organisation and to accelerate human development outside their organisations. South Africa has social and economic problems such as a high unemployment rate with rich natural

resources. Such distortions in the economy highly influence the rate of development (Abbott *et al.*, 2013). The high unemployment rate, according to Statistics South Africa, has reached its highest level of 27.7% (Stats SA, 2017).

In fighting for contribution to strategy and relevance within organisations, HR still finds it challenging as it is seen as a low priority (Schute *et al.*, 2015). HR does a disservice to itself which can be observed from the lack of cohesion between HR academics and HR practitioners (Callaghan, & Papageorgiou, 2014). Some HR executives are complacent and increase the gap between themselves with lower level HR personnel, and HR executives themselves do not rate themselves highly.

Wanting to be strategic does not automatically make someone able to think and act at a critical strategic level. Education is only one part of what makes people effective in HR roles. Practical experience and personal development should be seen as the building blocks of a professional career (Cohen 2015). HR departments should have an HR strategy that is aligned with the organisation's business strategy to gain a competitive edge (Schultz, 2010; Steyn, 2012). The HC BRidge framework was adopted by Magau and Roodt (2010) and is considered as an attempt to systematically identify connections between human capital investments and strategic business objectives. Their findings continue the sentiment that HR management is still not viewed as adding value by the recipients of HR services. To cater for this shortcoming, Magau, and Roodt (2010) recommended that HR management should therefore first develop human capital metrics and analytics before they can become recognised as a full strategic business partner.

In their study, Pietersen and Engelbrecht (2005) analysed the strategic partnership role of senior HR managers in South African organisations. They found that professional competencies could explain a significant variance in strategic partnership. A positive relationship was found between business-related competencies and strategic partnership. A positive relationship was also found between strategic role motivation as well as strategic role opportunities and strategic partnership. Nel *et al.* (2006) admitted that HR professionals in their own right have their own view of the competencies which they must possess. This antecedent can be observed from previous work (Mitsubishi *et al.*, 1998; Wright *et al.* 1998) which concluded that it is hard to convince line executives that HR management does provide a value-added contribution to the firm in the face of calls for blowing up the HR function.

Mitsubishi et al. (1998), in the Chinese context, also argued that line executives are more dissatisfied with current HR capabilities than are HR managers. Lawler (2004) further exacerbated the challenge as his study found that fewer than 40% of HR executives surveyed reported that HR management is a full partner in strategy development. To add to the disappointing situation, is that only 25% of senior executives reported that HR management is a full partner in the development and implementation of business strategy

Lawler (2004) in Magau and Roodt, (2010:3) gave the following reasons for the poor rating:

- *HR executives are rarely on corporate boards.*
- *HR executives are not members of the senior management team.*
- *HR management is often mired in administrative data and ends up with a largely administrative role.*
- *HR executives' careers do not expose them to business and business strategy.*
- *HR management does not have the kinds of metrics and analytic capabilities that finance and marketing have.*

What is saddening from an HR perspective is the lack of follow-up studies which can aid in the measuring of the strides made from the previous decade. With the changes which have occurred in the world of work, O'Brien and Linehan (2014) admitted that HR practitioners are expected play a dual role (business partner and protector of employees). They also manage and implement strategies and practices which react to the economic circumstances. To note, on the HR conundrum, the roles identified in the literature are not contradictory in nature, but they place more responsibilities on the HR practitioner and thereby justify the need for more qualitative studies on HR competencies. Schutte et al.'s (2015) study affirmed the scant literature on HR competencies, especially in the South African context.

For HR to attain competitive advantage, Brewster et al. (2008) indicated that HR professionals must be a talent manager and organisational designer, a culture and change steward, a strategy architect, an operational executor, a business ally and a credible activist. Magau and Roodt's (2010) study gave evidence that HR management was not yet fully aligned with respect to strategic business objectives and of becoming a strategic business partner.

HR strategy and the business strategy must be integrated. Wright et al.'s (1997) results indicated that such involvement currently results in both positive and negative outcomes. They observed that involvement of the HR executive was unrelated to organisational performance in a bivariate sense. Also, under the study context, efficient production core competence and high

involvement of the HR executive negatively impacted refinery performance. This relationship was also observed (albeit marginally significant) with regard to the new business development competence. This negative relationship may stem from HR executives being thrown into a strategic role for which they might not yet have developed the necessary skills. HR practitioners believe that their contribution to business success is meaningful, but line management's view on HR's value-add is not aligned with this (Lawler, 2005).

HR leaders need to be equipped with competencies (Selmer & Chiu, 2004). One can trace many of the woes of the reputation of HR managers back to a lack of the universally accepted standards of qualification, experience, and peer recognition that come through professional registration. HR professionals in the field were not willing to be reassessed as a measure for professional registration. This was attributed to the fear of failing to achieve the set standard (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). Pietersen and Engelbrecht (2005), in their study on the strategic partnership role of HR managers in South African organisations, found that there is a positive relationship between businesses-related competencies and the assumption of a strategic partnership role among HR managers.

Most people who practice as HR managers are not HR professionals, and, due to dumping that takes place, some employees who work in HR do not necessarily possess an HR-related qualification (Meisinger, 2006). HR departments are now prioritising HR educational qualifications which serve as HR career points, to establish credibility for the profession (Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). Johnson and King (2002) found that HR degrees were not adequate to prepare HR practitioners for their roles (Callaghan, & Papageorgiou, 2014), especially with the changes that are taking place in HR. Serim *et al.* (2014) purported that, due to the war on talent and changes in the workforce dynamics, HR is linking to financial performance to create value for organisations.

In this chapter, it can be noted that HR cannot be exclusively observed from an organisational perspective; due to the global village, HR must be looked at from the global perspective. The value of an HR qualification cannot be overlooked as a simple module of HR and does not mean that one has mastered HR, thus emphasising the value of a degree in human resources. Literature synthesis points to a Masters in Business Administration being the solution for practitioners to acquire business skills. MBAs are argued by Weiss (1997) to cause practitioners to be viewed as credible business partners by line management. Johnson and

King's (2002) findings indicate that practitioners who possessed business knowledge, delivery of HR, and management of change were viewed as more effective leaders by co-workers.

The environment in which HR is operating, especially in South Africa in which unemployment and redressing the imbalances of the past remain, needs to be addressed. This is the mandate of HR. The SABPP mandated the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to conduct research on the demand and supply of personnel practitioners in 1994. The findings from the study by Swanepoel et al. (2003) in Anderson (2006:196-197) are summarised as follows:

- i. *Managers in South Africa realised that quality and well-being of the workforces of organisations are key influences on their productivity.*
- ii. *The role of HR specialists was changing from the provision of primarily support services to involvement in the core business of organisations (strategic management).*
- iii. *HRM was devolving from human resource specialists to line managers, thus freeing the HR specialists to focus more on human resource development and play the role of consultants.*
- iv. *The importance and high priority of affirmative action in organisations was being recognized.*
- v. *An increasingly strong focus on HR development was growing, which was aligned to affirmative action programmes and other socio-political changes taking place in South Africa.*
- vi. *HRD was becoming more modular, and the trend was towards matching it with a “national qualifications framework.”*
- vii. *Emphasis on the development of basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and accelerated development programmes was increasing.*
- viii. *Revolutionary developments in the field of information technology were further affecting the work of personnel practitioners.*
- ix. *In the work domain, aspects such as HRD and organisational change and development were increasing in relative prominence. Furthermore, industrial relations remained important, and employee welfare, community upliftment, and social investment were also becoming important.*
- x. *Administrative skills became less important.*
- xi. *The market for HR professionals was becoming increasingly competitive as they became highly skilled in the ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.*



- xii. *Entrepreneurial and strategic thinking abilities were growing in relative importance.*

The above study was commissioned 23 years ago, yet HR is still facing the same challenges in the profession. Such challenges cement the competency agenda as a feasible approach to HR meeting its mandate. Competencies must be explicit in how they are key for one to acquire a job; sustain the job and contribute to the development of the profession. HR must be a profession; HR professionals must contribute to strategy, with the guidance of professional bodies in carrying out their mandate.

2.4 REGULATION OF HR, PROFESSIONALISM AND PROFESSIONAL BODIES

There is no common body of knowledge for HR that is accepted by scholars and practitioners. This contributes to the problem of formulating answers to the supply side question, especially one that can be addressed by a single programme of the university (Owen, 2006). Researchers are trying to prove that a positive correlation exists between innovative HRM practices and companies' performance and their capacity to innovate (Alsaghir, 2010).

From literature, the professionalisation of HR can be tracked through the work of Dave Ulrich. As identified earlier, the development of HR can be traced to America, thus it is fitting that the trends for the professions emanate from the same continent. Of importance is the identification of the professional bodies which exist for HR, the periods during which they were formed, and the roles they play in their respective countries. This is important so that it is possible to find commonalities in the existence of professional bodies. The professionalisation of HR has only been done in South Africa, whereas the USA and Europe are yet to move to fully fledged professionalisation as other disciplines tend to 'dump' unsuccessful managers into the HR field (Klimoski, 2001). HR still continues to struggle for needed power and influence within the professions, organisations, and governments (Ruona, 2016). This has been to the detriment of the reputation of HR managers; one cannot control the quality of entrants without entry requirements. Human resource management has formalised its structures to a greater or lesser extent in various countries. Thus ensuring structures for professionalisation are met.

The professionalisation agenda is not new as there are other professions which have already been established such as medicine, accounting, law, and engineering (van Rensburg, 2009; Fletcher, Sharif & Haw, 2016). Professionalisation and professional bodies, as discussed by van Rensburg (2009), have developed from as far back as the guild system in medieval times. Sox (2007) looked into the professionalisation of the medical profession. He used the medieval

guilds as a sound theoretical framework to justify the professionalisation of the medical profession in the United States. He asserted that, similar to the guild system, the medical profession used guild powers as they controlled entry into a craft, training, and standards of quality. Van Rensburg (2009) argued along similar lines for the HR professionalisation.

What is key to professionalisation, similar to the guild system, is that only the individuals who are well trained are accepted in the system, i.e. knowledge and skills are prerequisites for joining this profession. Thus, the origin of professional bodies could be argued to stem from the guild system in medieval times. The aspect of keeping the unqualified out was undeniably part of this system (van Rensburg, 2009). Sox (2007) also shared that there is a triangular relationship between the state, capitalism, and the medical profession. Similar to South Africa, the social systems or the state of society, the role of the state is key to the professionalisation of HR. In this case, the challenges of redressing the imbalances of the past also shape the direction which HR is taking.

Williams, Onsman, and Brown (2009) proffered that when professionalisation takes place, it moves through four stages: creating full-time occupations; establishing training schools; establishing professional bodies; and developing codes of ethics. Professional bodies are crucial as most have the mandate for certification of HR professionals. Aguinis and Lengnick-Hall (2012) highlighted the importance of certification of HR although their work was subject to criticism. They advised on the need for valid criteria which can be used in the certification of HR. However, certification does not mean one is strategic or competent. The HR profession needs assessments at all levels, beginning with the entry-level HR professional, to help develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities for effective performance on the job (Cohen, 2015).

Fox (1996;1) pronounced that professionalism includes : (1) *a distinct body of specialised knowledge*; (2) *specialized education in that body of knowledge which distinguishes between a particular professional and the laity which that profession serves*; (3) *some credentialing apparatus by which particular professionals may be certified*; (4) *a professional association or association (cross socialization affirming) meetings including such things as rewards and a hall of fame for exemplars of the profession*; (5) *some sort of policing mechanism to insure adherence to professional norms by those claiming a particular professional status such as codes of ethics of various exhortational or sanctioning postures*; (6) *a commitment to use a particular professional expertise for the benefit of society as a whole*.

Professions are governed by regulating bodies, professional titles, requirements for accreditation, for internship, experience and CPD, codes of ethics and applicable laws (Leonard, 2004; McEvoy *et al.*, 2005; Van Rensburg, *et al.*, 2011). In countries in which HR is appreciated, the history for professionalisation is supported with the presence of a professional body (van Rensburg, 2011). This is notably represented in the United Kingdom by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), in the USA by the Human Resource Certification Institute, or HRCI and in Canada by the Canadian Council of Human Resource Associations, or CCHRA.

2.4.1 Professional bodies

It thus fits to start with the American context. Scholars (Leonard, 2004; McEvoy *et al.*, 2005) consider the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) as the “forerunner” in the development of HR. However, the journey began with the American Society for Personnel Administration (ASPA) in 1948 and was led by a visionary administrator (Leonard, 2004; SHRM). With time, the SHRM became the global engine of HR (McEvoy *et al.*, 2005; Leonard, 2004).

In South Africa, the body which was first established for the certification of HR professionals was the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) which was established 1946, after which it became the institute for training and development and then the institute for professional development (Anderson, 2017; Bingham, & Druker, 2016; Davies 2017; Kigozi, Jowett, Lewis, Barton, & Coast, 2017; Weerakkody, Osmani, Waller, Hindi, & Al-Esmail, 2016). The respective bodies responsible for HR are as follows: in Hong Kong in Asia, the Hong Kong Institute of Human Resource Management; for Canada, the Canadian Council of HR Associations (CCHRA) (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011); and in Britain, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) (Anderson, 2017; Bingham, & Druker, 2016; Davies 2017; Kigozi *et al.*, 2017; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011; Weerakkody *et al.*, 2016).

2.4.2 Regulation of the HR profession in South Africa

The SABPP came into official existence in October 1983 with the inauguration of the first SABPP with the support of South African organisations (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). However, the authors further stated that the SABPP was originally founded between 1973-1976. The professional body has been in existence for over 30 years, yet it only seems to be making inroads in the current millennium. The absence of state intervention can be the reason for this as the body only made inroads after it had been acknowledged by the state. Van Rensburg *et*

al. (2011, p.2) drafted the stages and processes of professionalising HR in South Africa from Abdulla and Threadgold (2010) and Wilensky (1964). The five stages were:

- ✓ developing the occupation into a full-time one and creating occupational territory
- ✓ establishing training schools or colleges and linking these to universities
- ✓ promoting the occupation to national and international parties
- ✓ obtaining professional licences and accreditation
- ✓ developing a code of ethics.

From the definition of a profession, the researcher observes that HR needs to be proactive and follow the steps of disciplines such as law, medicine, engineering, business and academics which are the occupations regarded as professions. These occupations have a clear path from academic qualification to the competencies required. As HR is now a profession it needs to follow a similar pattern.

When the SABPP came into existence, it took into cognisance the socio-political climate which existed. The aim was to ensure equality within the workplace. Also, the board in professional registration had to accommodate senior practitioners who had no HR background. It is also interesting to note that the certification of HR qualifications was done in the year 1993 (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011) with the following academic institutions being accredited: University of Fort Hare; University of the Free State; University of Port Elizabeth; University of Potchefstroom; University of Pretoria; University of Stellenbosch; University of South Africa; and University of the Witwatersrand.

The first board exam for the professional body was written in 1990, and was designed for practitioners who did not have the necessary academic qualification (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). This also brings out the discord in the socio-political and economic system which existed in South Africa. In South Africa, professional bodies are recognised by the qualifications authority. This is not only unique to South Africa as Srimannarayan (2013) credits government legislation in India as it was instrumental in the evolution of HR.

Under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF Act 67 of 2008), SAQA is compelled to register professional bodies and professional designations on the NQF. The Minister of Higher Education and Training is required to consult with the three Quality Councils (SAQA). The

SABPP is an accredited Education and Training Quality Assurance body under the NQF Act Act 67 of 2008 and the Skills Development Act (SABPP, 2015). In 2011, the SABPP was recognised as a professional body.

SAQA defines a professional body as “*anybody of expert practitioners in an occupational field and includes an occupational body – that is a body constituted to represent and/or regulate a recognised community of expert practitioners*” (<http://pbdesig.saqa.org.za>). In 1982, the SABPP was established as an “*autonomous body to be the standards and professional registration body for the HR profession*” (SABPP, 2015).

The professions of engineering, accounting, medicine and law were found to have four core elements, namely mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skills; commitment to integrity and morality through a code of conduct; autonomy in practice; and the privilege of self-regulation. This comprises acceptance of a duty to society as a whole. Van Rensburg et al. (2011) in their study concluded that HR is grounded with the same four main pillars of professionalism as engineering, accounting, medicine and law. Changes which have taken place in the HR profession point to HR as being a semi-profession which is making strides to become a true profession (Balthazard, 2014). HR development in South Africa is anchored in legislation, the Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA), which is accredited by the SABPP for human resource management and development (SABPP, 2015).



In the South African context, the development of HR which is under the scope of the SABPP was mandated to SABPP by SAQA Act No 58 of 1995. SAQA gave the mandate for quality assurance in HR qualifications to the SABPP, thus arguably setting the foundation for the professionalisation of HR in South Africa (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). The SABPP revised the bill for HR professionals in 2006. The professional body’s function is to position HR to be a recognised and respected profession.

2.5 COMPETENCIES

The competence movement can be traced as far back as the Roman Empire, as they sought to profile the attributes that make an ideal soldier (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014), thus cementing that it has existed with man for a long time. The 1970s saw the competency-based approaches being incorporated in the corporate world (Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006).

If the HR function is to fulfill its aims, HR professionals need to possess the competencies required to perform their responsibilities (Srimannarayana, 2013). Most studies on HR competencies have been conducted in the USA. However, that is not to say literature from other countries does not exist.

This section defines competencies as we move to identify the HR competencies. There is consensus from literature on the origins of the "competency movement," and it is credited to McClelland (1973): (Boyatzis, 1982; Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012; McEvoy *et al.*, 2005; Rodriguez *et al.*, 2002; Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014). Table 2.1 is a literature synthesis on the definition of competencies.

A holistic approach notes that the term incorporates numerous constructs which one must possess to be relevant in the world of work. Using the work adjustment theory, competencies need to be aligned to the prerequisites of an organisation rather than a set for a desired outcome (Robertson, Callinan & Bartram, 2002). In defining a competency, Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung and Lake (1995) viewed it as a reflection of a person's abilities and their role which is to add value to an organisation. Ulrich *et al.* (1995) proffered that a competence must drive an organisation to attain sustainable competitive advantage.



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Table 2.1: Definition of competencies in literature

Competencies are underlying characteristics of people and indicate ways of behaving or thinking, generalising across situations, and enduring for a reasonably long period.	(Guion, 1991;335)
Competencies can be motives, traits, self-concepts, attitudes or values, content knowledge, or cognitive or behavioural skills - any individual characteristic that can be measured or counted reliably and that can be shown to differentiate significantly between superior and average performers, or between effective and ineffective Performers	(Spencer & Spencer, 1993; 4)
A mixture of knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, beliefs, values, and interests	(Fleishman, Wetrogen, Uhlman, & Marshall-Mies, 1995;10.1)
A knowledge, skill, ability, or characteristic associated with high performance on a job	(Mirabile, 1997;21)
A written description of measurable work habits and personal skills used to achieve work objectives	(Green,1999;5)
A descriptive tool that identifies the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and behaviour needed to effectively perform a role in the organisation and help the business meet its strategic objectives	(Lucia & Lespinger, 1999;5)
Competencies are defined as the knowledge skills and abilities needed to perform defining what makes up a competency varies but literature sums it up to how the workplace defines it	(Naidoo et al. nd)
A competency is defined as the underlying characteristics of a person which results in effective job performance.	(Coetzee & Schreuder 2012)
Competency is a combination of tacit and explicit knowledge, behaviour and skills that gives someone the potential for effectiveness in task performance	(Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006)
McClelland (1976) described “competency” as the characteristics underlying superior performance. He is credited with introducing the idea of “competency” into the human resource literature; in his efforts to assist the United States Information Agency improve its selection procedures (Draganidis and Mentzas, 2006).	(UNIDO, 2002)
A competency is underlying characteristics of an individual, which are, casually (change in one variable cause change in another) related to effective performance.	(Boyatzis, 1982)
The KSA framework of competency is very popular in defining the competency concept. A competency is a set of skills, related knowledge and attributes that allow an individual to successfully perform a task or an activity within a specific function or job	(Gangani, McLean & Braden, 2004)

Source: Developed from Gangani, McLean & Braden, 2004; 1113 and researchers' literature synthesis.

Competencies are argued to be contradictory, as the definitions suggest. Competencies are rooted as organisational goals rather than human attributes (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2012). The general fallacy to competencies is their sole focus on the characteristics of job holders. Competencies are not behaviours or performance, but a repertoire of capabilities, activities, processes, and responses available to enable a range of work demands to be more effective by some people than others (Kurz & Bartram, 2002; Francis-Smythe, Haase, Steele & Jellis, 2006).

It is also challenging to differentiate between competencies and capabilities. In defining competencies, the term capabilities often arises as it is often confused with competency. However, these two concepts overlap each other as competencies relate to knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed to perform whereas capabilities are limited to specific tasks not the overall job as shown in Naidoo et al. (nd).

There is no consensus on the definition; it arguably can be nation-specific. The US version of competencies focuses on characteristics of the job holder. Thus it is worker-oriented as it focuses on inputs regarding behaviour and skills required by jobholders. On the other hand, in the United Kingdom and South Africa, the concept refers to meaningful skills related to specific occupations. Tripathi and Agrawal (2014) investigated the Indian context and it can be noted that the competency approach is similar to that in other developing nations. The greatest challenge is not only in identifying the relevant competencies and their components, but also how components of the competencies are developed. After competency identification, there is a challenge in determining how to develop and evaluate the competency (McEvoy *et al.*, 2005). From the above discussion, it can be observed that competencies are looked into depending on the interests; subject under investigation and location.

Competencies are ‘criterion validated’ (Armstrong, 2001); they should be measurable because they are derived from job analyses, including characteristics such as interpersonal skills, leadership, analytical skills, and achievement orientation (Micolo, 1999). Spencer et al. (1990) claimed that competencies consist of: (1) Motives – the underlying need that drives behaviour; (2) Traits – general dispositions; (3) Self-concept – the individual’s attitudes or values; (4) Content knowledge of facts or procedures; and (5) Cognitive and behavioural skills – either covert or observable. Nowadays, competencies are used in many facets of human resource management, ranging from individual functions like recruitment and performance management to organisational strategic planning, such as the design of organisational structure and culture. HR competencies are said to be a set of characteristics contributing to effective HR performance enabling an organisation to achieve its business strategies in a competitive market (Budhwar 2002).

2.6 HR COMPETENCIES

The HR professions focus on the competency approach is not a new phenomenon (Tripathi & Agrawal 2014). Studies which focus on identifying competencies for effective performance of HR competencies are not new (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Heffernan, & Flood, 2000; Long, Wan Ismail, & Amin, 2013; Ulrich *et al.*, 1995; van Esch, Wei, & Chiang, 2016; Yeung *et al.*, 1996). In the journey of identifying HR competencies, Eichniger and Lombardo (1990) identified cognitive complexity and agility, achievement directed assertiveness, interpersonal effectiveness, personal management, business savvy, and job skills as the leadership areas for HR. Lawson’s (1990) study classified business knowledge, influence management, functional

and organisational leadership, goal and action management, and HR technical proficiency as the essential competency clusters for HR executives. Leadership style, management intuition, functional abilities and personal attributes were identified by Schoonver (1997) as core HR competencies.

In the HR context, competencies are used for the improvement of performance for employees and their organisation. HR practices include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, career development, compensation and pay (Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014). Most of HR subsystems are linked to competency models and are integrated in HR activities. There is consensus from literature on the matters pertaining to studies with few respondents and it is agreed that a single respondent does not suffice as authoritative on matters pertaining to HR practices in the workplace. There is need to align between the intended, actual and perceived HR practices which have a varying impact on performance (Zhu *et al.*, 2013).


Competencies were introduced as a measure to: strengthen the HR process; improve operational effectiveness; drive organisational change; and implement competency models (Gangani, McLean & Braden, 2004). In the HR context, a competency is known to include skills, abilities, knowledge, and personality characteristics and is symbolised in competencies such as knowledge of the business, delivery of HR practices, management of change, management of culture and personal credibility (Chrysler-Fox & Roodt, 2014). McEvoy *et al.* (2005) described HRM professional competence as what one knows and usually leads to superior performance as an HR professional. HR strategy and competitive advantage are based on an organisation's culture, objectives and capabilities. The weakness of traditional HR methods (training, career development plans and job analysis) is that they often omit strategic objectives (Klett, 2010).

For organisations to create and maintain a competitive advantage, the effective management of human capital is regarded as a critical factor in the 21st century (Selmer & Chiu, 2004). The development of HR competencies is credited to Ulrich (1997), Novak, Žnidaršič, and Šprajc, (2015), and Long (2008). Ever-increasing international competition, aggressive mergers and acquisitions, high-speed electronic communication, and rapid technological advances, along with demographic and social changes (Selmer & Chiu, 2004) are catalysts of the competency movement. Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) argued that there is a challenge in identifying which of the changes are essential to HR. Competency levels of HR professionals influence

whether one can be allowed into the boardroom (Truss & Gratton, 1994; Selmer, & Chiu, 2004).

These demands on HR are set against changing workforce demographics which include a shortfall in skilled labour worldwide and indications that more people are leaving the workforce than joining it (Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). Van Rensburg et al. (2011, p. 6) requested respondents' opinion on the value of competency of HR professionals in giving the organisation a leading edge. Respondents indicated they believe that the role of HR managers is becoming increasingly important, and attributed it to the following factors:

- *international competitiveness;*
- *increased productivity requirements;*
- *retaining young talent or highly talented practitioners;*
- *that knowledge property is becoming the most significant competitive edge;*
- *a recurring skills shortage that requires intervention;*
- *that governments increasingly require competent and strategic HR services.*

Competencies can be classified under  traditional HR competencies and modern HR competencies (Bohlouli, *et al.*, 2017; Jamrog, & Overholt, 2004; Ruona, & Gibson, 2004; Schiemann, & Ulrich, 2017; Selmer, & Chiu, 2004). As derived from the argument above, HR professional bodies have informed most studies on essential HR competencies (Brewster, Farndale, & van Ommeren, 2000; Losey, 1999; Ostroff, & Bowen, 2016; Rynes, Colbert, & Brown, 2002; Ulrich, & Brockbank, 2016; Yeung, 1996). HR competencies are extremely essential in the modern day as they are considered as influencers in creating innovation and value to organisations (Serim, Demirbağ & Yozgat, 2014).

HR competencies are a set of characteristics contributing to effective HR performance which enables an organisation to achieve its business strategies in a competitive market (Selmer & Chiu, 2004; 326). Ulrich, Brockbank, Yeung, and Lake (1995) referred to HR competencies as individuals' demonstrated knowledge, skills, and abilities. Thus, lack of HR competence is a serious issue (Cohen, 2015).

2.6.1 Traditional HR competencies

Traditional HR functions, as assessed by Gangani, McLean and Braden (2004), focused on staffing and selection, education and training, career development, and performance

management. Johnson and King (2002) synthesised staffing, benefits, and compensation as traditional HR functions; and said that strategic planning and continuous improvement must be included. They noted that new competencies are more relevant in larger organisations.

Traditional HR practices (hiring and staffing; learning; career development; succession management) remain relevant in organisations as they address gaps in organisations (Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014). Although new roles have been added to HR, the discipline still needs to attend to traditional employee advocacy roles and act as the steward of the social contract (Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). In the Chinese context, the most HR dominant themes were recruitment and selection; training and development; compensation and rewards; and performance management (Zhu *et al.*, 2008).

Areas covered in traditional HR include staffing, training and development, and compensation. These areas are essential for the curriculum as they equip learners with the traditional tasks required of HR generalists (Callaghan, & Papageorgiou, 2014). Industrial relations help learners to understand why they are required to do certain HR activities, traditional HR shows them what they need to do (Heneman, 1999), and the “traditional HR” is seen in the new programme as well as what we see as the “new HR”.



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Analytical skills, people skills, and functional content knowledge are essential to human resource consultants and organisational policy makers. Analytical skills have been ignored by most HR researchers (Lawler III, Levenson, & Boudreau, 2004; Lakshminarayanan *et al.* 2016; Müller, Schmiedel, Gorbacheva, & vom Brocke, 2016; Sembiring, 2016). However, HR professionals require such skills as they enable practitioners to collect, analyse, and interpret data so as to add value to organisations (Heneman, 1999). In the traditional curriculum, a statistics module was responsible for handling the skill (Thacker, 2002). Heneman (1999) proffered that such a module is inadequate in equipping learners with the skill as it does not provide learners with the research and computer skills essential for conducting HR activities (design surveys, conduct validity studies, measure productivity).

In Kaufman (1999), the following were identified as the traditional areas that HR focuses on: benefits/health care, career planning; communications, compensation counselling/EAPS, employee safety and health HR planning, job analysis, job design, management, development, motivation, recruitment, selection, succession, planning, training, performance appraisal/management, separation process/organisation exit, collective bargaining discipline,

labour economics, and labour relations laws/legal issues affecting HR. Literature seeks to identify the essential competencies required to be a successful HR practitioner. Most studies have focused on the traditional roles of HR and these are not adequate to assume the modern role for a strategic business partner (McEvoy *et al.*, 2005). Figure 2.2 below is a classification of HR competencies by Johnson and King (2002).

Table 1
Essential competencies for future HR/IR practitioners

<i>Classical IR</i>	<i>New HR</i>
Collective Bargaining	Business Process Reengineering
Discipline	Changing Nature of Employment Contracts
Labor Economics	Downsizing
Labor Relations	Employee Involvement
Laws/Legal Issues Affecting HR/IR	Ethics
	Evaluating HRM Function
<i>Traditional HR</i>	Facilitation/Internal Consulting
Benefits/Health Care	General Business Management
Career Planning	Global HRM
Communications	HR Information Systems
Compensation	Managing Change
Counseling/Employee Assistance Programs	Managing Diversity/Cultural Diversity
Employee Safety and Health	Organizational Assessment
HR Planning	Quality of Worklife
Job Analysis	Strategic Role of HRM
Job Design	Team Building
Management Development	Union Avoidance
Motivation	Work and Family Issues
Performance Appraisal/Management	Workteams
Recruitment	<i>Personal HR Competencies</i>
Selection	Formal Communications
Separation Process/Organization Exit	Interpersonal Communication
Succession Planning	Integrity
Training	Managing Relationships
	Problem Solving
	Technological Ability

Figure 2.2: Essential HR competencies

Source: Adopted from Johnson and King (2002; 544).

2.6.2 Modern HR competencies

As HR takes a new direction (strategy), this enables learners to add value beyond traditional HR functions and responsibilities. The purpose of leadership skills is to ensure HR aids organisations in organising, managing, and leading HR interventions such as a new compensation, staffing, or training system. This also ensures practitioners understand financial statements and the strategic jargon. Practitioners are trained to connect with specialists from other business disciplines (Anderson 2017; Bingham, & Druker, 2016; Bohlouli, et al 2017; Cascio, & Boudreau, 2016; Gao, Zhang, Zhao, Li, & Wu, 2016; Heneman, 1999; Jamrog, & Overholt, 2004; Long, *et al.*, 2013; Meyer, 2014; Odağ, Wallin, & Kedzior, 2016; Ruona, &

Gibson, 2004; Schiemann, & Ulrich, 2017; Schutte, & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, *et al.*, 2016; Selmer, & Chiu, 2004. van Esch, Wei, & Chiang, 2016).

Selmer and Chiu, (2004) conducted factor analysis and identified eight factors: a) human resource knowledge; b) financial/business knowledge; c) corporate relations; d) innovation and crisis management; e) organisational knowledge; f) strategic labour relations; g) professional personal skills; and h) change agent. Of these eight factors of competencies, change agent, professional personal skills, and innovation and crisis management had the largest assessed differences between the two groups of CEOs and HR practitioners, indicating a substantive strategic gap in these areas. The finding by Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) were inconsistent with literature as HR executives perceived financial, technical, and general business skills as not essential to the future of HR. In spite of this finding, they were hesitant to advise HR programmes to drop courses such as accounting.

2.7 HR COMPETENCY MODELS

Most scholars have used competency models adopted and modified from professional bodies of their respective nations (Anderson, 2017; Bingham, & Druker, 2016; Davies 2017; Kigozi *et al.*, 2017; McEvoy *et al.*, 2005; Selmer & Chiu 2004; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011; Weerakkody *et al.*, 2016). The development of publishing HR competency models in USA is the mandate of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) (McEvoy *et al.*, 2005). As the SHRM is the trendsetter, the 2014 model as looked at and then the researcher will them move to the South African context and explore the two models by the SABPP.

Competency models are justified for HR professionals as they support them to achieve success and sustainability within their respective organisations (Schutte *et al.*, 2015). Abdullah, Musa and Ali (2011) were of the opinion that the changes taking place in the world of work are responsible for competency models gaining momentum. Table 2.2 below is the HR competency model which is applicable to practitioners in the USA. The SHRM model is divided into three categories, namely competency domain, definition, and competency of interest. The SHRM model fuses all areas (traditional and modern) HR competency areas and areas in HR practice. As the HR competencies model has been revised over the years and with the SHRM being the leading competency body globally, models which come after this, as illustrated in Table 2.2 and Figure 2.3, are derived from the SHRM.

Table 2.2: SHRM Competency model

Competencies		
Competency domain	Definition	Competencies of interest
HR technical expertise and practice	The ability to apply the principles and practices of HRM to contribute to the success of the business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic Business Management ● Workforce Planning and Employment ● Human Resource Development ● Compensation and Benefits ● Risk Management ● HR Technology ● Employee and Labour Relations ● Global and International HR Capabilities ● Talent Management ● Change Management
Relationship management	The ability to manage interactions to provide service and to support the organisation. <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <p>University of Fort Hare</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Business Networking Expertise ● People Management ● Visibility ● Advocacy ● Customer Service (Internal and External) ● Negotiation and Conflict Management ● Credibility ● Community Relations ● Transparency ● Proactive ● Responsiveness ● Mentor ● Influence ● Employee Engagement ● Teamwork ● Mutual Respect
Consultation	The ability to provide guidance to organisational stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creativity and Innovation ● Coaching ● Project Management ● Analytic Reasoning ● Problem-solving ● Flexibility ● Respected Business Partner ● Career Pathing/Talent Management/People Management ● Time Management ● Inquisitiveness
Leadership and navigation	The ability to direct initiatives and contribute to processes within the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Results and Goal-Oriented ● Resource Management ● Project Management ● Mission Driven ● Political Savvy ● Succession Planning ● Transformational and Functional Leadership ● Change Management ● Influence ● Consensus Building
Communication	The ability to effectively exchange with stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Persuasion ● Verbal Communication Skills ● Written Communication Skills ● Diplomacy ● Perceptual Objectivity ● Active Listening ● Effective Timely Feedback ● Presentation Skills

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitation Skills ● Meeting Effectiveness ● Social Technology and Social Media Savvy ● Public Relations
Global and cultural effectiveness	The ability to value and consider the perspectives and backgrounds of all parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Global Perspective ● Openness to Various Perspectives ● Tolerance for Ambiguity ● Openness to Experience ● Diversity Perspective ● Adaptability ● Empathy ● Adaptability ● Cultural Awareness and Respect
Critical evaluation	The ability to interpret information to make business decisions and recommendations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Measurement and Assessment Skills ● Objectivity ● Critical Thinking ● Curiosity and Inquisitiveness ● Problem Solving ● Research Methodology ● Decision-making ● Auditing Skills ● Knowledge Management
Ethical practice	The ability to support and uphold the values of the organisation while mitigating risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rapport Building ● Trust Building ● Personal, Professional and Behavioural Integrity ● Professionalism ● Credibility ● Personal and Professional Courage
Business acumen	The ability to understand and apply information to contribute to the organisation's strategic plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic Agility ● Business Knowledge ● Systems Thinking ● Economic Awareness ● Effective Administration ● Knowledge of Finance and Accounting ● Knowledge of Sales and Marketing ● Knowledge of Business Operations/Logistics ● Knowledge of Labour Markets ● Knowledge of Technology ● Knowledge of Government and Regulatory Guidelines ● HR and Organisational Metrics/Analytics/Business Indicators

Source: Adapted from the Society for Human Resource Management (2014). SHRM elements for HR success: Competency model. Retrieved from <http://www.shrm.org/HR/Competencies/Pages/default.aspx>.

Table 2.3 Generic SABPP competency model 1

COMPETENCE = EDUCATION + TRAINING + APPLICATION + BEHAVIOURAL BASE				
Level	Knowledge base	Skill base	Experiential base	Behavioural base
Managerial	Social sciences 1. Industrial psychology 2. Industrial sociology 3. Industrial Law/Labour Law	Functional 1. Research methodology 2. Measurement 3. Assessment 4. System design 5. Group process 6. Mentoring	Employee level Deployment 1. Recruitment 2. Selection 3. Career management 4. Termination	Professional 1. Systemic thinking 2. Measurement Orientation 3. Objectivity 4. Judgement 5. Innovation 6. Assertiveness

	<p>Business sciences 4. Business Management 5. Economics 6. Accounting 7. Statistics 8. Computer systems</p>	<p>7. Consulting Managerial 8. Leadership 9. Planning 10. Budgeting 11. Communication 12. Marketing and promotion 13. Negotiating 14. Change management 15. Monitoring 16. Reporting</p>	<p>5. Retirement planning Administration 6. HR policies 7. HR procedures 8. Job evaluation 9. compensation management 10. Employee assistance programmes 11. Occupational health 12. Industrial relations agreements 13. Disciplinary procedure 14. Grievance procedure 15. Accommodation and feeding 16. Recreation Performance development 17. Course design 18. Induction/orientation 19. On-the-job training 20. Off-the-job training 21. Performance Assessment 22. Development counselling 23. Job advancement 24. Educational assistance Group level Intragroup functioning 25. Team development 26. Conflict management 27. Participation Intergroup functioning 28. Matrix management 29. Cross-cultural environments 30. Industrial relations structures 31. Trade union relationships 32. Collective bargaining Organisational level Corporate strategy 33. Business planning 34. Manpower planning 35. Succession planning Corporate structure</p>	<p>7. Accountability 8. Integrity 9. Confidentiality 10. Flexibility Interpersonal 11. Respectfulness 12. Recognition 13. Responsiveness 14. Empowerment 15. Consultation Managerial 16. Customer focus 17. Quality focus 18. Cost focus 19. Results focus</p>
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			36. Organisation design 37. Job design 38. Resource utilisation Corporate functioning 39. Corporate values 40. Employee motivation 41. Opportunity Equalisation 42. Human resource surveys	
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Source: Swanepoel *et al.*, (2003:58)

Together with Eskom, the SABPP published a Generic Competency Model for human resource practitioners in 1990 (Van Rensburg, *et al.*, 2011; Anderson 2006; SABPP, 1990:4-5). The introduction of the generic model by the SABPP set precedence of the knowledge, skills, experiential and behavioural base required by professionals wanting to embark on an HR career. The SABPP model begins with the definition of a competence. A competence is a combination of education, training, application, and a behavioural base (Anderson 2006; SABPP, 1990:4-5). The generic competency model for South Africa is divided into five categories: level, knowledge base, skill base, experiential base and behavioural base. The SABPP 2012 competency model is illustrated by Figure 3.2 below.

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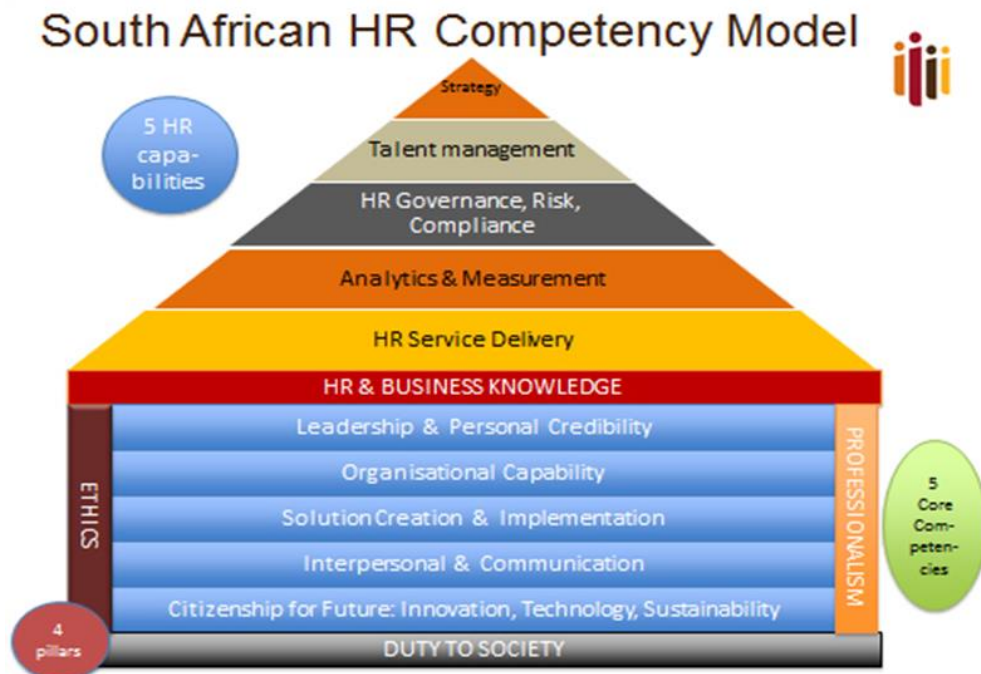


Figure 2.3 SABPP competency model

Source: <http://sabpp.co.za/hr-competencies/hr-competency-model/>

As HR is evolving to market dynamics, competency modelling is argued to have the potential to fill an important void in traditional HRM functions through the infusion of strategic orientation in day-to-day employee behaviour (Serim *et al.*, 2014). The SABPP's competency model was categorised into three broad competence areas: Pillars of HR professionalism, core competencies, and HR capabilities. The four pillars, ethics, duty to society, professionalism, and HR and business knowledge set the foundation for HR professional practice. The five core competencies, namely leadership and personal credibility; organisation capacity; solution creation and implementation of interpersonal and communication citizenship for the future; technology and innovation; and technology sustainability seek to ensure professionals in HR do work of high quality and thus the capabilities are oriented on the strategic role HR practitioners must play. Strategy, talent management, HR governance, analytics and measurement and HR service delivery are identified as the strategic HR capabilities (SABPP, 2012). As can be noted, the HR model adopted by the SABPP consists of 15 key areas which can be deconstructed. The SABPP model was informed by various practitioners in South Africa. Schutte (2015) was the first scholar to test the SABPP 2012 model empirically.

2.8 STUDIES ON HR COMPETENCIES



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In this section, the researcher presents the competencies identified by Ulrich (1997) and colleagues and then discusses other studies in different contexts to see which competencies are essential within the HR profession. With competency modelling, in traditional HRM functions, it is important to avoid confusion of strategic orientation in day-to-day employee behaviour through identifying competencies critical to the strategic goals as competencies are a powerful communication tool which translate the vision into behaviour terms that people can understand and implement (Sanchez & Levine, 2009). Novak et al. (2015) reported on a professional competence which takes into consideration the knowledge and skills that are related to the employee's particular field of work; it is a combination of all characteristics, abilities, and experience employed in the everyday activity as specialised knowledge.

The pioneer of HR competency studies identifying appropriate HR competencies that influence firm performance is Dave Ulrich and his associates who conducted several studies. From the earlier studies (1987) regardless of industry; Ulrich in his work identified; business knowledge, HR delivery, and change management as the key competencies; Proceeding to (1989) knowledge of business, world class delivery of human resource practices in their specialty which include staffing, development, appraisal, rewards, organisational design and

communication, and management of change process were the key competencies; In 1992 Personal credibility; ability to manage culture and change competencies; From 2002 strategic contribution; HR technology were the key competencies. Ulrich et al (2007) categorised HR competencies into six clusters such as credible activist, culture and change steward, talent manager/organisational designer, strategy architect, operational executor, and business ally; credible activist, strategic positioner, capability builder, change champion, HR innovator and integrator, and technology proponent were identified in the 6th round conducted in 2013 (Ulrich et al, 2013).

In South Africa, there is scant literature on HR practitioners' opinions regarding their competencies. However, Horwitz, Browning, Jain, and Steenkamp (2002) identified performance improvement, employment equity, training and development and managing trade union expectations as the most important workplace challenges that HR practitioners faced at the time.

From a nation's perspective, there are studies which focus on HR competencies such as Khatri and Budhwar (2002), Singapore; Selmer and Chiu (2004), Hong Kong; Han, Chou, Chao and Wright (2006), Taiwan; Haroon et al. (2010), Pakistan; Abdullahi et al. (2011) and Long and Ismail (2011), Malaysia; and Premarajan (2011) and Srimannarayana (2013), India. From the identified studies, the role and status of HR was identified; a framework to guide the future direction of HR was mapped; top managers supported the strategic role of HR; certification of HR programmes had begun.

What is key though is that most of the studies tried to gain a positivistic insight into the identification of HR competencies. In spite of the sizeable number of studies to justify HR, and especially in South Africa where since the dawn of apartheid challenges and areas of improvement of HR have been identified, and despite the presence of such fact, HR still continues to have a voice in most organisations globally.

Table 2.4 portrays the researcher's literature review on methods adopted and the competencies identified in the study. Quantitative studies which have identified HR competencies, e.g Schutte et al. (2015), give practitioners a validated measure which can be used by organisations to measure performance of HR practitioners. HR professionals should be able to establish a process to ensure they make use of their competencies and make meaningful contributions within their organisation.

Table 2.4: Studies on HR competencies

Author	Method	Competencies
Schutte, Barkhuizen, & Van der Sluis, (2015)	Quantitative	<i>Professional behaviour and leadership (consisting of the factors Leadership and personal credibility, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication and Innovation), Service orientation and execution (consisting of the factors Talent management, HR risk, HR metrics and HR service delivery) and Business intelligence (consisting of the factors Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, HR business acumen and HR technology).</i>
Schultz, (2010).	Quantitative	<i>Business knowledge, HR practices, personal skills and management skills</i>
Becker et al. (2001)	Quantitative	<i>Personal credibility, management of change, management of culture, delivery of HR practices and knowledge of the business</i>
Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) (2003)	Quantitative	<i>Willingness to innovate, integrity, negotiating skills, business knowledge, an ability to deliver targets, strategic thinking, leadership ability, empathy/ communication /listening skills, understanding HR practices and influencing/political skills.</i>
The International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) (2009)	Quantitative	<i>Change agent, business partner, leader and HR expert</i>
SABPP 2009	Quantitative	<i>Integrating HR management and practices into an organisation's business strategy and operations, and co-ordinating and managing the core processes-related to HR management and practices at an operational level in line with best practices</i>
Mondy and Noe (2005)	Quantitative	<i>Strategic contribution, business knowledge, personal credibility, HR delivery and HR technology</i>
Nel et al. (2006)	Quantitative	<i>Relationship builder, exceptional communicator, conflict resolver, creative HR leader, assisting line managers in pursuing the business strategy, and addressing changed circumstances in organisations. Communication, problem solving, leadership, recruiting and selection, an adherence to employment law, training and development, technology, forecasting, compensation design, benefits design and administration, and accounting or finance record-keeping. It is important for the HR professional to be a relationship builder, an exceptional communicator, a conflict resolver, a creative HR leader who assists line managers in pursuing the business strategy and who increases an organisation's capacity for rapid change through addressing changed circumstances in business</i>
Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz and Younger (2008)	Quantitative	<i>Credible activist, culture and change steward, talent manager/organisational designer, strategy architect, operational executor and business ally</i>
SABPP's South African HR Competency Model (SABPP, 2012)	Quantitative	<i>Leadership and personal credibility, organisational capability, solution creation and implementation, interpersonal and communication skills, citizenship for the future, strategy, talent management, HR governance, risk and compliance, analytics and measurement, HR service delivery, HR and business knowledge, ethics, professionalism and duty to society.</i>
Selmer & Chiu, (2004)	Quantitative	<i>Change agent, Professional personal skills, Innovation and crisis management, Organisational knowledge. Change agent, Professional personal skills, Innovation and crisis management, Organisational knowledge.</i>
Novak, Žnidaršič, & Šprajc, (2015).	Quantitative	<i>Leadership Strategic thinking, Teamwork, Communication, Change management, Decision-making and responsibility, Creativity and innovation</i>

		<i>Professionalism, People-orientation, Results-orientation, Business knowledge, Time and work organisation, Accuracy, Analytical thinking, Use of ICT.</i>
Kohont (2005)	Quantitative	<i>Leadership, strategic thinking, teamwork, communication, change management, decision-making and responsibility, creativity and innovation, professionalism, people-orientation, results-orientation, business knowledge, time and work organisation, accuracy, analytical thinking, and the use of ICT.</i>

Source: researcher literature synthesis

Schutte et al. (2015) identified that most if not all studies which have explored the HR context on practices and competencies in South Africa opted for a positivistic outlook. This can be the reason why the same competencies are coming to the fore and the studies seem to confirm the ranking of competencies. At the same time, HR is still not making significant inroads in organisations, yet literature exists to justify its reliance. This is justified in Table 2.4 above.

Change agent; professional and personal skills; innovation and crisis management; and organisational knowledge were identified as areas for development by HR practitioners in Hong Kong (Selmer & Chiu, 2004). Keller and Campbell (1992) in Johnson and King (2002) endorsed four competency areas as of essence to the growth of HR capability: functional competencies (global HR, talent assessment); business competencies (organisational development, business and financial measured); personal competencies (career development, leadership style effectiveness); and organisational competencies (valuing diversity, facilitation/consulting).

McEvoy et al. (2005) added that culture management and personal credibility, innovation and competitive improvement are products of human capital management. Human capital involves enhancement of job performance through a systematic process of determining competencies (Klett, 2010). According to McEvoy et al. (2005), the missing gaps identified in industrial relations and HR by employers were written and oral communication skills, leadership, negotiation skills, knowledge of organisational dynamics, and strategic understanding of HR.

The profession should continue to pursue the goal of having legislation passed or obtaining a charter for HR management that has national sanction (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). Analytical skills include strategy, work design, measurement, statistics, finance, marketing, multicultural skills, information systems, decision making, and problem solving, whereas leadership process skills involve managing teams, negotiations and conflict resolution, leadership, change management, and communications (Heneman, 1999).

Kaufman, (1996) identified management and leadership skills; consulting, advising, and negotiating skills; analytical skills; quality and organisational change skills; computer and information technology skills; and oral and written communication skills as future HR competencies. Hansen (2002) proposed accounting; benefits; budgeting; compensation; employee analysis; equal employment law; finance; job analysis; labour markets; labour law; management; marketing; negotiation/mediation; organisational behaviour; production processes; public; policy; recruitment staffing/evaluation; quality improvement; training as the relevant knowledge areas for HR professionals.

Ramlall (2006) viewed internal consultant; staffing; implementing HR strategies; administrative tasks; change agent; designing HR strategies; compensation; organisational assessment; labour relations; legal matters; partnering with senior executives on strategy formulation, in this order, as the areas that HR practitioners spent most of their time on. In the same study, professionals were required to rate their self-perceived competence over HR competencies, in order of importance ranging means of 4.18-2.65: professionals ranked delivering HR; technical competence; managing change; understanding the business; managing the organisational culture; organisational development skills; strategic contributions; metrics, marketing, accounting as the ideal HR competencies.

Selmer and Chiu (2004) identified human resource knowledge; financial/business; knowledge; corporate relations innovation and crisis management; organisational knowledge; strategic labour relations; professional personal skills; and change agent as their HR competencies. Novak, Žnidaršič and Šprajc, (2015) in their study categorised 15 HR competencies which were relevant to the Slovenian context leadership: strategic thinking; teamwork; communication; change management; decision-making and responsibility; creativity and innovation professionalism; people-orientation: results-orientation business knowledge time and work organisation; accuracy analytical thinking; use of ICT.

Long (2008), in his study, expanded five competencies, namely strategic contribution; personal credibility; HR delivery; business knowledge; and HR technology which resulted in 18 competency factors. **Strategic contribution** - culture management, fast change, strategic decision-making, market driven connectivity; **Personal credibility** - achieving results, effective relationships, personal communication; **HR delivery** - staffing, HR development, organisation structure, HR measurement, legal compliance, performance management; **Business knowledge**

- value chain knowledge, value proposition knowledge, labour knowledge; **HR technology** - user of technology to deliver HR services, strategic HR technology in Malaysia. In Ulrich's (1997) work which motivated the growth of HR, he identified eight challenges which the field and practitioners were facing. These were: adding value, globalisation, defining organisational capabilities, adapting to change, successfully dealing with technological innovation, achieving organisational transformation where needed, achieving profitability through both cost cutting and growth, securing competence and intellectual capital, as the essential HR competencies. The most cited scholar in the development of modern HR is Ulrich. Ulrich et al. (1995) attributed technical HR skills, change agent skills, knowledge of financial management, culture management and personal credibility, customer demand, external competitive threats, and knowledge of the business to be essential for success for HR professionals.

HR strategic areas include recruitment, skill gap analysis, career development plans, training efforts, self-organised learning, as well as learning management, self-assessment, and mobility (Klett, 2010). Selmer and Chiu (2004) noted that as business partners, HR managers are expected to add strategising and diagnosing to their job descriptions. Selmer and Chiu (2004) in their study stated that HR practitioners in Hong Kong were underequipped to play strategic roles due to years of their continuous neglect by other professionals. HR professionals are advised to be competent in functional (operational), tactical (managerial), and strategic (organisational) matters. Regarding the number of role changes and new challenges, Sheehan et al. (2006) noted that these dynamics of HR did not spare Australia and thus they investigated HR developments in the country. Their findings of their study revealed that the strategic role of HR professionals was increasing which was indicated by more than half of the senior managers being involved in the decision-making process. Gaps still existed and there were challenges which professions have to manage.

HR competencies represent the characteristics, knowledge and skills of an HR professional (Schultz, 2010). Schutte (2015) rated interpersonal communication, leadership and personal credibility and HR business knowledge as being the most important competencies in South Africa. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2010, p.6) cited communication as the most important competency of the senior HR leaders in the United States. In Canada, India and in the Middle Eastern and in the Northern African countries 'strategic thinking' was ranked first but in the USA it was ranked second.

Organisational performance depends on common HR practices regardless of the industry. What is also observable in the literature is the failure to separate HR practices and competencies. Steyn (2012) used the Human Resource Practices Scale to measure the perceived effectiveness of the HR practice. The instrument has 27 items to cover five competencies: training and development, compensation and rewards, performance management, staffing, and diversity management. Selmer and Chiu (2004) designed their own instrument to measure HR competencies in Hong Kong from their factor analysis, HR knowledge, compensation systems and benefit programmes – these competencies were professional personal skills, strategic labour relations, change agent, innovation and crisis management, financial/business knowledge, organisational knowledge, and corporate relations.

As empirical research on competency requirements for HR professionals in the South African context is scant. The few detailed empirical studies that were conducted in this field focused primarily on the desired roles and practices of HR practitioners in South African organisations. The study by Schutte et al. (2015) validated an HRM competence measure for the assessment of professional HRM competencies in the workplace. A cross-sectional factor analysis was used: *Professional behaviour and leadership (consisting of the factors Leadership and personal credibility, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication and Innovation), Service orientation and execution (consisting of the factors Talent management, HR risk, HR metrics and HR service delivery) and Business intelligence (consisting of the factors Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, HR business acumen and HR technology)* were validated as competency measures to measure the performance of HR practitioners in the organisation.

Literature within the South African context which has explored the desired roles and practices of HR practitioners is that of Coetzee, Mitonga-Monga and Swart (2014) who indicated: *Job satisfaction, training and development and rewards and remuneration positively predicted affective commitment. Leadership, rewards and remuneration and training and development also positively predicted normative commitment. Human resources policies and procedures positively predicted continuance commitment* as the desired HR practices required by organisations in an engineering environment to influence organisational performance in a turbulent and perpetually competitive world of business. Schultz (2010) determined the HR competencies at a merged higher education institution. The results declared business knowledge, HR practices, personal skills and management skills as the vital HR competencies. Schultz (2010) pointed out that staff were not satisfied with the current HR competencies and consequently this necessitated attention to improve the deficient areas.

Srimannarayana (2013) ranked HR competencies and found that the HR practitioners in India ranked credible activist as the top competency. In Srimannarayana (2013), the perception of rating the top HR competency was influenced by gender, work experience, education, organisational size and functional area of the respondents. Srimannarayana (2013) further observed that culture and change steward, talent manager/organisation designer and operational executor are near-strengths of HR professionals in India. The domains of strategic architect and business ally were identified as the developmental needs of HR professionals in India. From a business nature perspective, practitioners in the manufacturing sector were found to have a relatively higher perception of HR competencies than service and IT/ITES organisations. The higher the experience, the higher the perception of HR competencies. HR executives demonstrated higher competence in HR competencies compared to non-HR executives. Schutte (2015) in their factor analysis categorised competencies into three distinct categories, namely professional behaviour and leadership competency dimension (*Leadership and personal credibility, innovation, interpersonal communication, solution creation*); service orientation and execution competency dimension (*talent management, HR service delivery, HR metrics, HR risk*); and the business intelligence competency dimension (*strategic impact, HR business knowledge, HR business acumen, HR technology*). From a South African perspective, there is confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of HR practitioners and their lack of competence to fulfil key roles due to the lack of sufficient studies on these aspects (Schultz, 2010).

2.9 CHALLENGES OR WEAKNESS TO HR COMPETENCIES

Selmer and Chiu (2004) criticised previous studies that have been conducted in Hong Kong for they were conducted during the time of the Asian financial crisis and the authors warned that some competencies were about survival and adapting. The economic and political climate can influence the development of a field. Arguably, this can apply to the South African context as the economy has recently gone through a recession. Khatri and Budhwar (2002) noted that most studies are inclined toward the opinions of HR practitioners. Studies conducted in contextual isolation often mislead as they fail to advance understanding in any significant way (Khatri & Budhwar, 2002; Selmer, & Chiu, 2004). Selmer and Chiu (2004) advised that in looking into HR competencies it is essential to consider the opinions of chief executive officers (CEOs). They regard CEO's views as objective and HR practitioner's views as subjective. Lundy (1994) cemented their opinion by noting that opinions of CEOs are usually different to those of HR executives. HR must not be considered from a single country

perspective' instead it must be considered from an internationalised perspective due to the global dynamics (Gangani, McLean & Braden, 2004). HR leaders should master both traditional and new skill areas (Selmer & Chiu, 2004).

Cheung (2001) found that most of HR practitioners in Hong Kong have no say over corporate strategies and directions. This is because they are known to be poorly equipped to play such a part since professional HRM training in Hong Kong has largely neglected strategic aspects (Selmer & Chiu, 2004). The findings of Selmer and Chiu (2004) on comparing perceptions of CEOs and HR executives indicate a substantive strategic gap.

The challenge to competency modelling and competency models within HR from the above literature is not limited to the economy, social or political environment, instead it is about how other contributors to strategy view HR practitioners. In the current environment in South Africa in which there is high unemployment and an election coming, it will mean more pressure on HR as they have to ensure they fulfil the mandate of political parties, especially for employability within state institutions.

2.10 THE BIG PICTURE – THE WAY FORWARD

Van Rensburg et al. (2011) ascertained the success of HR to achieve professionalism in South Africa. If the HR function has to contribute effectively to improve organisational performance, the HR professionals need to demonstrate their competencies, particularly in the domains of strategic architect and business ally (Srimannarayana, 2013). In order for HR to be valuable, rare intangible and to attain its competitive advantage, from a theoretical perspective as alluded in the previous chapter, the RBV is the most theoretical foundation.

In considering the bigger picture, Boudreau (2014) conceded that HR professionals have more than enough to deal with merely by attending to the traditional areas of the profession. Thus leaving less room to experiment on advancing and emerging trends such as a boardroom seat. Boudreau (2014) has offered a solution for HR by suggesting that other functional leaders assist so as to reduce the burden and focus on the core areas. Evidence shows that collaboration and cross-discipline innovation hinges in part on shared conscious and unconscious frameworks that shape how people approach and solve problems. Evidence exists to support this notion as the Wright, McMahan, McCormick and Sherman (1997) study endorsed that the higher involvement of HR in organisational strategy was strongly related to perceptions of HR effectiveness, and that the relationship was strongest to the extent that refineries pursued a product innovation strategy and viewed skilled employees as their core competence. No

empirical evidence was found by Marler and Fisher (2013) to determine whether e-HRM predicts strategic outcomes. Evidence which suggests that strategic HRM predicts e-HRM outcomes was viewed as context dependent, and the limited research designs resulted in insufficient grounds to establish causal direction.

The way forward for the profession is that HR organisations must reach out beyond these traditional areas. In the current economy, HRM is putting greater emphasis on business functions, rather than problem-solving and mediation (Armstrong, 2009). Boudreau (2014; 194) mentioned the “soul of HR” which means that HR is unique as a profession in its focus on the humanity of work. From this standpoint, a qualitative orientation adopted by the researcher can be justified as the humanity of the profession seems to be ignored by the existing competency models which seem to focus on areas that HR is moving to and has not yet grasped. My argument for the study then is when we are informed on what is essential for employability and career success, we can thus know the soul of HR and we can be in a better position to identify some of the challenges identified by Boudreau (2014) and how we can go about them. Theories such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA), theory of planned behaviour (TPB) and the self-determination theory are better positioned to ensure that those who embark on an HR career will achieve what they intend to. The (TRA), TPB and the self-determination theory are key as they considers both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

The TRA (Ajzen’s, 1985; 1991) and the TPB (Ajzen’s, 1985; 1991) focus on theoretical constructs concerned with individual motivational factors as determinants of the likelihood of performing specific behaviours (Glanz *et al.*, 2015:95). Ajzen (1985, 1991) noted that the TPB has a strong utility for a wide range of human behaviours, while the TRA solely focuses on volitional personal/social factors when explaining an individual’s intention formation (Ajzen, 1985; Park 2003). Using the TPB, Hlatywayo, Marange and Chinyamurindi (2017) revealed that perceived behavioural control is the best predictor of intention. In line with the challenges highlighted in Boudreau (2014), joining the HR profession must be voluntary so that one can exhibit specific attitudes which result in specific behaviours.

The self-determination theory is premised on the fact that individuals have innate tendencies towards personal growth and vitality that are thwarted or satisfied by their immediate environment (Black & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). To explore how HR professionals rank their employability and eventually move up the ladder, especially in the South African context, is dependent of the environment. The self-determination theory addresses three

universal innate and psychological needs, namely competence, autonomy and psychological relatedness. When individuals experience these three, they become self-determined and are able to intrinsically motivate themselves to pursue what interests them. Under autonomy, people need to feel in control of their own behaviour and goals; competence refers to people mastering tasks to learn different skills; relatedness talks to the need by people to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Black & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005).

In order for HR to be valuable, rare, intangible and to attain its competitive advantage, from a theoretical perspective as alluded to in the previous chapter, the RBV is the most theoretical foundation. From the RBV, as discussed earlier, HR can focus on the behaviours which are not imitable and thus contribute to strategy with skills and competences steering the direction. Cohen (2015) admitted that the future for HR requires specialised knowledge, academic preparation and practical experience. Lambrechts et al. (2013) identified the role of competence-based higher education as that which equips learners with the relevant knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that they will require in their future professional and personal lives.

2.11 CONCLUSION

The idea of professionals being ‘dumped’ in HR existed in South Africa before the end of apartheid; however, 23 years later the same problem still exists – as is evident in the literature. HR being strategic and a contribution to strategy is still being debated upon and this drives us to the question of where we are getting it wrong as a profession. The motivation behind the study was to ensure that those who become HR practitioners do take a pledge to the profession, by putting the interest of HR above themselves. The burden is therefore on the person practising to prove that they are qualified.

What is also interesting to note, there is no agreement from literature on who can best identify the competencies for the HR profession. This is because most researchers have used perceptions of other non-HR executives to explore the contributions of HR to the boardroom table. From my perspective, if HR is to take the professionalisation agendas and is to be taken seriously as a profession, in as much as perceptions from other contributors to organisation strategy matters, much of the crux has to be by HR professionals as they have a greater understanding of their profession and have sound experiences regarding where they are going.

In the current century, HR is not yet recognised as a profession globally, and plainly put, the idea is met with cynicism. This chapter provided a background to the profession of HR. Employability and career success are discussed in the next chapter. From the chapter, it has

been observed that regardless of the paradigm shift, competency models in HR seem to ignore the foundation (employability) and focus on career success (effective performance).



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CHAPTER 3

EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER SUCCESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the direction which HR is taking. As HR strives for legitimacy within organisations, there is need for the profession to be driven by practitioners who are competent and have mastered and acquired the competencies for the profession. As observed, HR challenges in South Africa have existed since the dawn of democracy. For employability within the HR profession, one is required to have a combination of qualifications, knowledge, approaches, motives, values, abilities and other constituents of competences. Competencies often focus on the final result rather than look at one's efforts or attempts. This chapter defines the constructs of employability and career success. The stakeholders in employability are identified, models are discussed and factors which influence the constructs are also discussed.

3.2 WHY EMPLOYABILITY?

Academic knowledge and technical skills do not suffice for one to acquire employment in the current market (Hall, 2016; Fallows & Stevens, 2000; Peet, 2016). World markets along with organisations have integrated into one unique market (Ulrich, & Ingham, 2016). As a result of this, organisations have become more dynamic and they are no longer static, but constantly changing for survival (Ulrich, & Brockbank, 2016). The current work environment has been modified and continuously changing to the extent that it is affecting the relationship between education and work (Guerrero, Granados & González, 2014; Sermsuk, Triwichitkhun & Wongwanich, 2014; Vazquez, 2014). Focus on employability is required by employers for future purposes to maintain jobs and work efficiently (Sermsuk *et al.*, 2014). Employability is defined in the context of what is required by employers, universities, and the state (policy maker). Most studies conducted on employability are not discipline specific (Finch *et al.*, 2016; González-Romá, Gamboa, & Peiró, 2016; Universities UK, 2016); however, studies which cater for a specific profession do exist, e.g. Sarkar, Overton, Thompson and Rayner (2016) looked at employability within science; Tymon and Batistic (2016), Pinto and Ramalheira (2017) science; Clarke (2017) considered business graduates; and Chavez, Dotong, Camillo, and Laguador (2016) considered public service and engineering, among others.

From the preceding discussion, it can be observed that employability in itself is evolving and the term acquires different meanings depending on context. Employability can be enhanced by

one's environment, according to De Vos and De Hauw (2010), and Van Vianen, van der Heijden, Van Dam, and Willemsen (2009) who affirmed the importance of organisation support. The major merit of focusing on employability is to ensure that HR graduates can positively contribute to organisation success (Cohen, 2015; Mullen, 2016).

3.3 DEFINING EMPLOYABILITY

Defining employability is a challenge as it includes job-search skills which are argued by Tisch (2014) to be disguised under employability especially in the current labour reforms. As the definition expands, it incorporates the maintaining of work, which makes employability a continuous endeavour (Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). There is general consensus within employability literature on employability being more than just about obtaining a job. What is critical is the nature of the work graduates obtain in terms of realising potential, satisfaction and fulfilment (Minten & Forsyth 2014). The debate on defining employability has been on-going since the late 1990s. Initially, the term referred to the ability to gain and maintain suitable employment, while now the term extends to career success (Keedi & Khalil, 2011).

Yorke (2004) defined employability as a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy. Hillage and Pollard (1998) viewed employability from an economic perspective and defined it as one's ability to retain a job in the labour market. The generally accepted criteria for employability considers: a) the individual meeting the required demands for the position, which begins by being able to convince prospective employers; and b) the person must be willing to work (Tisch, 2014). For competency-based organisations, Redmond (2013) defined employability as continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of competences (Serim, Demirbağ & Yozgat, 2014). Pool and Sewell's (2007) view of employability comprised possessing a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make a person more likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful, to benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

Employability puts emphasis on the skills and dispositions which make one attractive to potential employers (Bridgstock, 2009). In measuring employability, literature and most academic institutions take into cognisance only the number of graduates who have attained full-time employment six months after they graduate (Bridgstock, 2009; Pool and Sewell,

2007; Rae, 2007). Rae (2007) continued to define employability by involving the concept of lifelong learning inculcated in graduates by institutions of higher learning, considering that employability is a complex and problematic area with no obvious solutions. Critics argue that measuring graduate success should not be short term, employability must be assessed as an achievement for an institution rather than for an individual (Cranmer, 2006; Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2014; Sumanasiri, Ab Yajid, & Khatibi, 2016; Pool & Sewell, 2007), as the former method does not indicate what the student has benefitted. Employability also considers capabilities of getting, keeping and fulfilling work (Pool & Sewell, 2007).

Minten and Forsyth (2014) deduced from literature that employability has often been portrayed as the graduate job search as a planned and logical activity based on long-term career plans, rather than the likelihood of graduates having multiple careers, and therefore, requiring flexible goals and action plans. Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) noted that the individual perspective views employability from employee behaviour to dispositions.

Tomlinson (2007) reflected on employability and to an individual's attributes and biography. Potgieter (2012) summed up employability as an attribute which encompasses self-directedness or personal agency for retaining or securing a job or form of employment. However, Keedi, and Khalil (2011) argued that the term employability cannot be reduced to the skills such as computer literacy and numeracy. It must also take into cognisance attributes as in the current economic dimension of recessions in which skilled and experienced people risk being unemployed.

A competency-based development, according to Serim (2014), improves employees' performance which spills over to the organisation. From a competency framework, the term employability indicates "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of competences" (Redmond, 2013). Driving from this argument, defining employability is determined by having the adequate competencies to acquire employment. Employability incorporates elements of lifelong learning as the relationship does not cease; it requires a person to apply theory they acquired from university to ensure they not only maintain their employment but to progress within the profession of choice. Employability thus becomes a broad complex concept, which can be attained through education; however, literature seems to ignore traits such as passion for a job as they are also drivers of employability. From the theory of planned behaviour, choosing an occupation is a conscious choice and candidates ensure that they equip themselves with the necessary skills to not only acquire but sustain

employment. From the preceding chapter (Chapter 2), one common challenge to the competency model within HR is the focus on strategy and contribution to the boardroom whilst neglecting entry level requirements into the profession. However, employees' perception of competency modelling is based on relevance while "fairness" refers to employee perceptions of whether competency models are impartial (Redmond, 2013).

Perceptions of a competency model are positively related to employability outcomes (Serim, 2014). As the employees perceive the competency models applied in an organisation as fair and relevant, better employability outcomes can be achieved in competency-based organisations. Self-development in employability activities indicate the employees' voluntary efforts to enrol in activities that improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities, so that they are able to perform better in their current position, or in preparation for higher-responsibility positions within the organisation (Redmond, 2013).

3.3.1 Factors influencing employability

From the human capital theory, career advancement (Hayek, Thomas, Novicevic, & Montalvo, 2016) is influenced by traditional factors such as age (Hayek *et al.*, 2016; Frederiksen, & Kato, 2017) and education, work experience and training, job performance and organisation tenure, and gender (Adom, Adom, Asare-Yeboah, & Asare-Yeboah, 2016; Igbaria, & Chidambaram, 1997). On the other hand, social capital is also an influencer in employability. A person can make use of their social network resources available to advance their career prospects. Employability is a subjective issue, it can either be specific depending on the researcher's objectives or specific to the environment, while not having the right degree is also a factor which influences employability (Singh & Singh, 2009). Most degrees that universities are producing do not speak to the needs of the economies in specific nations. In their study, Potgieter and Coetzee (2013) came to the conclusion that in the current turbulent labour market, personality preference is essential to employability in the South African multi-cultural organisational context.

A positive relationship is known to exist between age and employability (De Vos, Forrier, Van der Heijden, & De Cuyper, 2017; Siivonen, & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; Van der Heijden, Gorgievski, & De Lange, 2016; Van Rooy, Alonso & Viswesvaran 2005). Older employees are given a lifeline by Blanco (2014) who argued that as long as a worker is active, they can improve their working ability and thus better adaptability to the challenges in the labour market. Age is a factor in employability because the older one gets the lower the prospect of

reemployment (Siivonen, & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; Tisch (2014). Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) added occupying a higher position as another factor which lowers employability prospects. The older age cohorts are argued to be less adaptable to the challenges of the global market; this is so as they are argued to have lost their learning ability and adaptability (Tisch, 2014; Van der Heijden, Gorgievski, & De Lange, 2016). De Armon et al. (2006) stated that as employees grow older, due to work experience, the lesser the job search challenges, they are less flexible and are not motivated to learn to new skills. Tisch, (2014) argued that age has not been considered in contemporary approaches toward employability.

Employability is also influenced by legislation (Reinhard, Pogrzeba, Townsend, & Pop, 2016; Atherton, 2017). In Germany, ‘Hartz legislations’ in 2003 was introduced as a stringent measure for the criteria for individuals who receive unemployment benefits. These individuals are expected to undergo and participate in employment and training or providing evidence of active job-search activities. Due to the recent economic recession, European policies have made employability a major concern for all countries (Guerrero *et al.*, 2014). In the South African context, employment equity legislation can be argued to enhance employability of individuals from targeted race groups (Dunne, & Bosch, 2015; Rogan, Reynolds, & Du Plessis, 2015.).



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Higher education levels are a tool which have a positive influence on employability of previously disadvantaged groups (Africans, Coloureds, Indians and women) (Mancinelli, Massimiliano, Piva & Ponti, 2010). Owuamalam and Zagefka (2014) touched on the effects of metastereotypes amongst stigmatised groups. Negative perceptions lead to reduced levels of self-esteem which in turn causes the groups in society which are underprivileged to downgrade their employability prospects. The underprivileged group as a result of the stigma will have reduced self-worth. Conflicting to existing perceptions on self-esteem effects, Owuamalam and Zagefka (2014) posited that those individuals with high (but not those with low) dispositional self-esteem are particularly vulnerable to such effects. Simply put, it means Africans, Coloureds, Indians and women have low self-worth which leads to them having reduced employability prospects.

Immigrants also face difficulty in obtaining employment (Allan, 2016; Moulettes, 2015). Challenges they face, among others, relate to skills, experience and training (Lucas, Barkho, Rudolph, Zhdanova, Fakhouri, & Thompson, 2014). The employment of migrants, according to Lucas et al. (2014). depends on the social and psychological predispositions of the host

nation. Political affiliation and national identity have both been found to be contributing factors to the exclusionary treatment of immigrants. This is against the lack of literature available on the joint influence of attitudes towards immigrants.

Knight and Yorke (2003) listed work experience, entrepreneurship modules, career advice, portfolios, profiles and records of achievement as ways which enhance employability. Knight and Yorke (2003) explained that learning cultures can help students to be more employable and that this is feasible when educators create an enabling environment. Due to stereotypes, women are less employable than men (Clarke, 2008), giving evidence that the glass ceiling still exists. Cueva et al. (2014) looked into the employability of women in Mexico and found that although opportunities exist and are important, they are limited and training is required for women to hold positions of influence in the labour market. Career self-management, cultural competence, career resilience, sociability self-efficacy, proactivity, emotional literacy and entrepreneurial orientation (Potgieter, 2012) are all skills in South Africa which increase a person's chances of securing and sustaining employment.

Bhorat and Van der Westhuizen (2009) identified outsourcing, labour brokering and part-time contracts among other challenges that employability is facing. Bad labour relations, lack of skills, an economy which is not growing have made the South African landscape to be an environment characterised by underemployment. Such challenges cannot be easily rectified due to the historical, political and social nature underlying underemployment (Schoeman, Botha & Blaauw 2010).

Literature exist on the merits of internships on meeting the job demands for employability and career success (Andrews, & Higson, 2008; Fakhro, 2017; He, Gu, Wu, Zhai, & Song, 2016; Maynard, 2003; Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000; Shoenfelt, Stone, & Kottke, 2013). The study by Gault et al. (2000) concluded that the benefits of internships to career success are that they provide students with positive implications, increased monetary compensation, and greater overall job satisfaction.

There is growing interest in the infusion of entrepreneurship into education curricula (Benneworth, 2016; El-Gohary, Selim, & Eid, 2016; Siivonen, & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; Smith, Jones, Scott, & Stadler, 2017) as the economies require more entrepreneurs. This so because entrepreneurial traits not only enhance the national economy but also the individual employability and success (Bell, 2016; Huq, Huq, Gilbert & Gilbert, 2017; Misra, & Mishra, 2016).

The value of personal attributes is not only limited to employability, but extends to success (Clarke, 2017; Harun, Salleh, Baharom, and Memon, 2017; Hayes *et al.*, 2016; Lim, Lee, Yap, & Ling, 2016; Pool, 2017; Wang, Jiang, & Feng, 2016). Harun et al. (2017) highlighted the critical skills and attributes required by employees and stated that these attributes were crucial for satisfaction. Thus, employability becomes more than just a set of technical competencies required by employers. This is evident in the level of satisfaction of the graduates that have been employed.

Emotional self-efficacy (emotional intelligence) is an important predictor of graduate employability and career satisfaction (Aziz, & Pangil, 2017; Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Di Fabio, & Kenny, 2015; Pool, 2017; Syed, Abiodullah, & Yousaf, 2014; Dacre Pool, & Qualter, 2013). Dacre Pool and Qualter (2013) in their study found that graduate employability mediates the relationship between emotional self-efficacy and career satisfaction.

3.4 STAKEHOLDERS IN EMPLOYABILITY

Employers, students, and universities are regarded as the key stakeholders directly affected by employability (Keedi & Khalil, 2011; Pais, 2012). Professional bodies and the state are also stakeholders of employability (Kruss, 2004; Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, & Lawton, 2012; Zaharim *et al.*, 2010). Globally, employees are required to transform knowledge and skills learnt into successful workplace performance. Literature has shown that employers are more concerned about soft skills or attitudes than technical knowledge or competencies (Yassin, Hasan, Amin & Amiruddin, 2008).

A precision consultancy (2007) report agrees that there is consensus from employers, universities and professional bodies on the need to produce and develop highly skilled professionals ready to face the challenges of increased competition. Such employees need to be flexible and intelligent across the business context when they respond to economic, social, cultural, technical and environmental change. Cohen (2015) advised that students, professionals, academicians and HR associations must work together for HR to have a bright future by mapping a consistent pathway forward. In moving to sector specific employability, it is crucial to identify the relevant stakeholders. However, driving from the generic challenges, in defining employability and the lack of a sector specific defining to the term, the researcher next discusses all the terms holistically.

Universities

Universities bear the brunt in employability as they have the mandate to produce the graduates who are work ready. Employers criticise universities for not producing graduates who are ready to face the world of work due to the curriculum being too theoretically oriented. Johnson and King (2002) insisted that education institutions must be monitored so as to observe how much they prepare learners for professions. Pavlin (2012) stated that university institutions should systematically establish relationships with employers, with the purpose of informing them about the expectations of programmes and graduates, and the intention to design study programmes together with them.

Novak, Žnidaršič, and Šprajc (2015) agreed to the role of education as they contended that HR study programmes should prepare students to acquire competencies to use their knowledge and their skills abilities to obtain suitable employment within HR. Johnson and King (2002) stressed that programmes should allow HR students to acquire the necessary competencies, because this is the only way they can effectively carry out the work of HR professionals. This also means the curricula should be appropriately adjusted.

Little empirical evidence exists regarding the influence of higher education on the development of professionalism among students. As competencies are an integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, the meaning of competence-based education should be explored (Novak *et al.*, 2015). Skills and knowledge for HR for the future need to be cultivated, taught and developed by institutions of higher learning. Having an HR qualification does not automatically prepare someone to be strategic, nor does it ensure career progression or success (Meisinger, 2007). Novak *et al.* (2015) conceded that students believe that they possess significant HR competencies.

Heneman (1999) undertook an evaluation of HR graduate education at Ohio State University with the aim of equipping learners with the skills required for value-added activities and to prove the relevance of such activities. Their vision and skills inventory made major changes such as the de-emphasising of labour relations and labour economics and providing more required courses for students. Instead of the focus on electives, more modules were used to emphasise the future for HR generalists rather than specialists. There was consensus at the Ohio State University regarding what should be taught to HR professionals so that they become invaluable (business language and financial competence) to organisations. It was agreed that graduates who lack the rigour are a product of graduate programmes which solely emphasise

leadership skills. Traditional HR skills are critical components of a graduate programme and when they ignore basics components such as job analysis, job evaluation and legal requirements, it leaves graduate students devoid of content expertise needed by management. Leader process skills are critical and must be complemented with analytical and functional skills. In conclusion, Heneman (1999) argued that a degree in business, law, or organisational development is not a substitute for a degree in human resources. As observed in some context, professional bodies have been the drivers of studies relating to HR competencies. Zhu et al. (2008) conducted an intensive literature review of the period 1979 to 2005 in the Chinese context. They found three major categories of research and practice: general HRM, strategic HRM, and industrial/labour relations. Issues identified in the literature dwell on the assumed causal relationship between HR practices and firm performance. Literature indicates that practitioners play a vital role with education institutions so as to ensure graduates are well equipped for the world of work. Competency models are used as student recruitment and selection tools; curriculum development tools, which include improving teaching material; as career development tools; and as a behavioural requirement for benchmarking.

In the South African context, there is no universally adopted HR curriculum and no relationship exists between practitioners, academic institutions and the state. There is no foundation that practitioner and academics can use so as to transfer knowledge. Academic courses are theoretically inclined and thus need to align academic output and work input.

There is no argument on the professionalisation of HR (Becker *et al.*, 2013; Ulrich, & Brockbank, 2016, Ulrich et al 2008; Ulrich, 2013; Wright, 1997). Thus, drastic steps need to be put in place so as to set a benchmark for academics, the state, practitioners and professional bodies. From the literature it was be noted that race, gender, and status of institution play a role in employability. Employability and career success are to be explored from an HR perspective so as to level the playing field. Knowledge must be used as a strategic asset for HR. When someone acquires a qualification, the next step involves becoming an entrepreneur of their own career, building a portable repertoire of competencies to maintain and enhance their market value (Hoekstra, 2011).

Rosales (2014) used the fields of medicine, nursing, law and engineering to list the set of skills required by employers and then developed employability skills. The centre of her argument was that these are employer requirements. Arguably, the global recession is increasing the unemployment levels. Hodges and Burchell (2003) observed that such changes are making it

cumbersome for curriculum developers, especially in competency identification and development. Employability and flexibility are enhanced by numerous factors in organisations, such as perceived organisation support (De Vos & De Hauw, 2010; Nauta, Van Vianen, van der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009). The studies of these authors show that organisational culture has a positive impact on individual development on employability. Universities must focus on soft skills which are the most valuable for future careers. Also, attitudes and the skill to learn are valuable to employability (Sermsuk et al 2014; Vazquez, 2014; Guerrero *et al.*, 2014).

In South Africa, questions on the relevance of higher education have been raised over the employability of graduates (Van Der Berg & Van Broekhuizen 2012). South African universities face a daunting task in ensuring employability as they have to equate access to education to resolve previous imbalances. The Green Paper (2012) takes cognisance of the persistent patterns of inequality that still exist in the current day. Although the intake of previously disadvantaged groups is increasing in tertiary education, black leaders are still underrepresented in business and commerce programmes as well as in science, engineering and technology. The South African higher education sector is becoming increasingly aware of the connection between tertiary education and the world of work (Coetzee, Botha, Nienaber & Holzhausen, 2012). South Africa's education system was previously characterised by policy segregation along racial and language lines. The education system was advancing the interest of the white minority (Bitzer, 2009). The injustices of the previous system created a system in which the white minority occupy favourable positions. This is a challenge for HR and HR graduates as it is their mandate to balance the wrongs of the previous system without affecting the quality of products they offer. Denial of quality education to the masses as stated by Horn (2006; 118) meant a lack of basic competencies required by the new structural economy. Examples to mention are mathematics, computing, reading, writing and reasoning; the ability to use resources and information constructively; interpersonal skills; the ability to understand systems and master technology; as well as flexibility to cope with change in the workplace.

State

In defining the term employability, the state allocates responsibility to the respective ministry or department which specialises in higher education. From a developed world perspective, the focus earlier on was on graduates acquiring jobs and of late the focus has extended to the integration of entrepreneurship (Boden & Nedeva 2010). The state also excludes itself from

influencing the mandate of universities. Developing African nations is characterised by erratic shifts in policies (Allais, 2012) and is thus posing a challenge for universities, graduates and employers. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa seeks to align the developmental needs of the nation and work hand in hand with government policies (Green paper 2012). The state still has numerous antecedents with regard to access, staffing, curriculum, management, student funding, other forms of student support, and other areas. From a developed and developing world context, the definition of employability is on graduates acquiring employment to service the respective economies of their countries.

The role of the state in employability is reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, arguably the massification of higher education has increased access to higher education. The state also plays a key role in the funding higher education to ensure access of previously disadvantaged. The state's role was to be the effective management of resources (Boden & Nedeva 2010). The state's definition is influenced by universities end products making use of their skills which is cemented by the shift from just getting jobs to creating jobs. The state does so by creating policies to ensure its mandate is met (Goodwin, 1995). For instance for South Africa the employability of segregated groups is a mandate of the state to ensure that organisations can find employ then to senior positions too.



Employers

A special relationship exists between universities and employers as a result of employability (Bara, 2014). The link between tertiary education and employers is through the transmission of knowledge, and directing the graduate skills towards employability and enterprise (Pérez & Cubero, 2014). The relationship is premised on the interests of multiple stakeholders and interested parties for economic development. Thus, stakeholders must optimise such relationships so that role players gain more from the relationship. There is thus pressure from multiple stakeholders and interested parties for economic development (Bautista-Cerro, 2014).

Employers' perceptions are essential as they influence the quality of graduates' ability to perform and their (graduates) transition into employment (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013). Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013) observed that employers noted that at entry level employees have an insufficient level of generic skills as a result of challenges in the change from school to the world of work. This notion was supported by failure to adapt, especially to keep pace with the refined requirements and demands of work. Most employers agree on the skills they look for from graduates and according to Archer and Davison (2008), soft skills are perceived

to carry more weight in the recruitment process by employers. Organisations require new hires to show particular enabling skills (Giannantonio & Hurley, 2002).

Incorporating employability skills to the curriculum is necessitated by the ever-increasing demands and needs of the employer and the highly volatile, ever-changing work environment. Thus employers will always require better and high quality workers (Sermsuk, Triwichitkhun & Wongwanich, 2014); and as determined in Minten and Forsyth (2014), labour market forces define the universalistic approach of students to employability. Practice and work experience are of great value in the job market (Pavelka, 2014). There is need to assess the feasibility of integrating skills in the development in curricula (Giannantonio & Hurley, 2002).

Some employers view a tertiary qualification as a proxy for achieving a certain level of competence and as the minimum requirement for acquiring employment (Gunn, Bell, & Kafmann, 2010; Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). Employers from different sectors share the sentiment that the type of graduates which universities are producing lack work readiness skills; however a shortfall still exists in literature regarding employers' perception of employability (Hodges & Burchell, 2003; Humburg van der Velden Verhagen 2013).

Graduates



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For work to be meaningful, graduates must occupy careers of their choice. One is responsible for securing knowledge, skills, abilities, and other traits considered marketable to current and prospective employers (De Vos & De Hauw, 2010; Savickas, 2011). Graduates are at the receiving end of employability as policy makers and the environment determine what they need to know, how they know it and when they must know it. Graduates require tertiary education as a ticket for employability. For graduates, a tertiary education qualification is key as there is a perception that learners who desire tertiary education are hardworking (Allais, 2012).

For employability, in the current context, due to competition and scarce jobs; The first job that graduates select is usually not of their choice but to pay off student loans (Kuhl, Reiser, Eickhoff, & Petty, 2014; Zhang, 2013). Pais (2012) confirmed that the first job graduates get is usually not of their choice. The first job is usually for financial reasons such as to pay off student loans, and work and live independently. For graduates, it is favourable to acquire employment soon after tertiary education, but the current world of work is not as favourable. This is determined by whether they have mastered the skills required by employers and in most instances social networks. The challenge for employability is in the current dispensation,

graduate careers are not anchored around single jobs and organisations (Minten & Forsyth 2014). The modern graduate is highly mobile and not bound to single careers (Docherty, & Fernandez, 2014; Olson, 2014).

Graduates may perceive that they possess the knowledge and skills required by employers, while employers actually look for different things (Andrews, & Higson, 2008; Henrich, 2016; Quek, 2005). Employees who lack skills and knowledge are destined to fail as skills and knowledge help in integration into the global economy (Salleh, Sulaiman & Talib, 2010). Naidoo et al. (nd) agreed that graduates do not perceive employability skills to be well developed within the accounting curriculum. HR degrees are there to serve as a foundation for professionals to build as they acquire work experience and continue professional development activities (Greer & Waight, 2017; McEvoy et al, 2005; Mullen, 2014). The class structure is the traditional medium for which technical HR knowledge is delivered. The drive for competences over knowledge acquisition makes it clear on the deficiencies of traditional modes of assessment (McEvoy *et al.*, 2005).

Professional bodies

As identified, the role of professional bodies, especially with the HR agenda, is to ensure professionalisation of HR and ensure the curriculum talks to the needs of the market – as discussed in Chapter 2. As identified in Chapter 2, the SABPP is mandated by SAQA to accredit HR qualifications in South Africa. With where HR is going, the role of professional bodies will be the drivers as they will seek to close the gap which exists between what universities offer and the needs of the market. With HR, competency models for the profession, standards and ethics are set by the professional body, regardless of country, e.g. SABPP for South Africa and SHRM for the USA.

3.5 MODELS OF EMPLOYABILITY

The adopted models will examine employability. The discussion will follow the main ideas of the originators and how they influence employability. Pool and Sewell (2007) advocate for all employability models to inform the planning of programmes and structured interventions intending to focus on the area. The Fugate and Kinicki dispositional model of employability (2004); Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden's (2006) competence-based employability model; and the Pool and Sewell (2007) key to employability model were adopted as appropriate

models for the construct employability. Models may differ but bear great similarities. Models are often refinements or revisions, frequently major, often minor, of already existing models.

3.5.1 Fugate and Kinicki's dispositional model of employability

Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth (2004) used a dispositional approach to employability and view employability as a multidimensional constellation of individual characteristics that predispose employees to (pro)actively adapt to their work and career environments. Fugate (2006) viewed employability as a disposition that captures individual characteristics that foster adaptive behaviours and positive employment outcomes, and it more accurately describes the action oriented, proactive, and adaptive qualities that employers now widely espouse and seek. Fugate (2006) built his case by explaining that conceptualising employability as a disposition seems appropriate, given the high level of uncertainty inherent in today's career landscape. Fugate et al. (2004) suggested three dimensions of employability, namely career identity, personal adaptability and social and human capital. Fugate (2006) explained that the construct of dispositional employability subsumes the commonalities between the three component dimensions, and thus represents the conceptual and empirical overlap between the dimensions that contribute to proactive adaptability at work. In an attempt to further represent the active and adaptable nature of employability, Fugate (2006) developed his model to include: openness to changes at work, work and career resilience, work and career proactivity, career motivation, social and human capital, and career identity. These dispositions are of relevance to the study as they provide insight into the construct of employability.

3.5.2 Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden's (2006) competence-based employability model

Van der Heijden (2002) defined employability as the capability of being employed in a job. According to Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006), employability at the employee level is advantageous for both present performance on the job as well as career outcomes (long-term performance, implying the process of adaption and learning). Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) indicated that besides adaptive behaviour, employability may contain personal elements such as personality, attitudes, and ability.

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) therefore proposed a competence-based approach to employability derived from an expansion of the resource-based view of organisations. According to the resource-based view of organisations, competences are one category of

possible resources that enable these organisations to reach performance and (sustained) competitiveness. The competence-based model of Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) comprises five competencies, namely occupational expertise, anticipation and optimisation, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance.

3.5.3 Pool and Sewell’s (2007) key to employability model

Pais (2012) adopted the CareerEDGE model as the key to employability of IT students. The employability model was used to aid graduates attain their first job. The Pool and Sewell model made graduates understand their potential skills and how to develop themselves further. The employability model was developed by Pool and Sewell (2007)

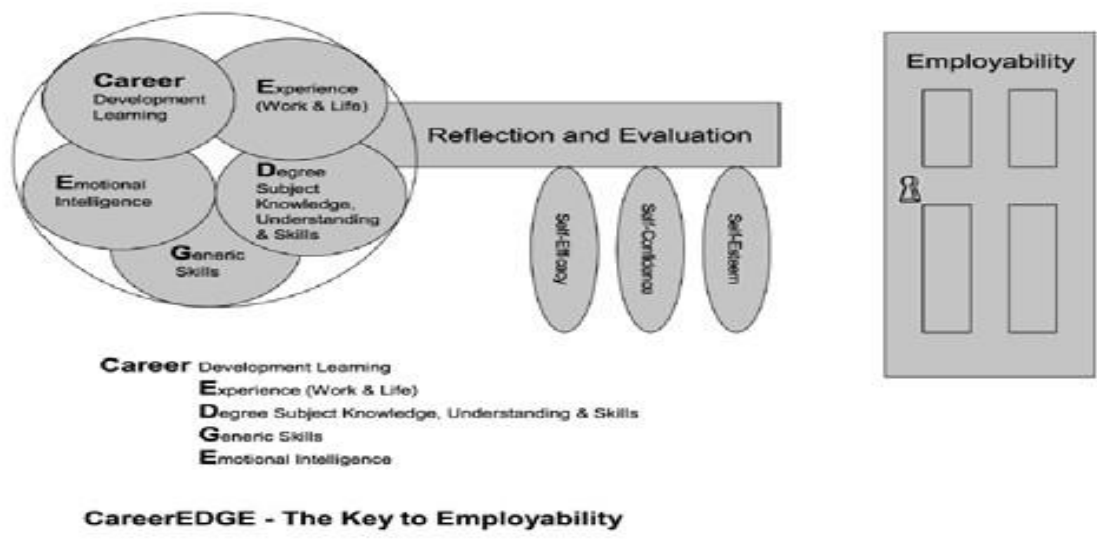


Figure 3.1: Adopted from CareerEDGE – The key to employability (Source: Pool and Sewell, 2007)

Pool and Sewell (2007) introduced a simplified, practical model of employability which set up a framework that could be used to develop student employability. Their model clarifies the information that must be considered and included in programme development. Their model is simple for lecturers, personal tutors, careers advisors and other stakeholders to comprehend. They believe that their model is valuable for the transfer of knowledge and that it brings together universities and employers (Wang, Jiang, & Feng, 2016). Their model is also useful to any life stage.

The models adopted for employability take into consideration competencies and attributes which are key to acquiring a job. The researcher incorporated lifelong learning in the definition

of employability and this is supported by the models adopted. It is not about getting the HR job, but progressing within the HR profession.

3.6 EMPLOYABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In the developed and developing world, higher education is participating in the production of quality graduates who are the drivers of economic development (Coetzee et al 2012; Kruss, & Petersen, 2016). From political to economic reasons, South Africa and Africa are paying critical attention to skills development as it can be used to combat post-apartheid challenges, such as poverty and unemployment (Akoojee, 2012). In South Africa, employability is a tool that scholars argue can redress the imbalanced society and reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. This is consistent with most developing nations (McCowan, 2014; Spaul, 2013). In the apartheid era, skills development was highly racialised (Allais, 2012). In the South African context, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGISA) is credited with the focus on studies based on employer expectations of graduates (Coetzee *et al.*, 2012).

The National Growth Plan as postulated by Coetzee et al. (2012) serves as a mechanism to combat developmental challenges including economic inequality, poverty and unemployment. The expected return is improved economic performance, and labour absorption. Political policies in South Africa enforce more pressure on higher education as they are supposed to produce graduates that steer economic growth and development. Human capital development literature has shown that most graduates are found wanting when it comes to the new requirements of the job. The challenge for employability is greater in South Africa as the nation is trying to redress the imbalances that were created by the previous regime of apartheid (Taylor, & Govender, 2017). Under the system, school leavers were intentionally under-prepared in terms of the breadth and depth of the subject-based knowledge (Samuel, 2002). Under the apartheid system, discrimination was well established in training and the education system was highly unequal. The curriculum at the time was producing low skills for the black populous (Allais, 2012).

The joint initiative for priority skills acquisition and the new growth plan are among the various mechanisms that the South African government has in place to explore the measures of graduate fit workplace. The Industrial Policy Action Plan 2, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010-2030, and South Africa's Ten-Year Innovation Plan are some of the strategies/policies that have been put in place for skills development in South Africa

(Green paper 2012; Coetzee *et al.*, 2012). This has put skills development under structural reconfiguration due to the global challenges (Akoojee, 2012).

3.7 THE NEW EMPLOYABILITY

The concept of employability has been developed within the context of competency-based organisations by indicating “the continuous fulfilling, acquiring, or creating of work through the optimal use of competences” (Serim *et al.*, 2014 p. 1102). The employability debate has been dominated by employers, universities and government at the expense of the job holder, thus the vast criticism. Defining employability now includes hierarchical progression, through a series of job roles involving increased responsibility and seniority, thus employability is multi-directional, dynamic and fluid (Minten & Forsyth 2014). Employability does not improve one’s status in society, as Pavelka (2014) noted, because this claim is for a highly qualified job which change one’s status. In order to be employable in HR, one needs the skills and abilities to be relevant in the current market (Potgieter, 2012). When employability is sustained, it contributes to career success and satisfaction (Coetzee & Schreuder, 2011).

The onus of the quality of education, due to the dynamics of the job market, is solely on the graduates to ensure they get a quality education (Savickas, 2011). To an individual, employability is driven by values and identities as career behaviours are influenced by personal dispositions and biographies (Tomlinson, 2007). The modern approach to employability was criticised by Rigopoulou and Kehagias (2008) who noted that it excludes whether the skills contribute to happiness in life for the employee. Lifelong learning is a skill that when mastered enhances someone in their career progression and improves organisation effectiveness (Bañeres & Conesa, 2016; Estienne, 1997; Fejes, 2014; Moir & Crowther, 2014; Quendler, & Lamb, 2016 Trede, & McEwen, 2015). New employability takes into cognisance that learning goes beyond the classroom, thus ensuring career advancement (Carbone, Hamilton, & Jollands, 2015; Trede, & McEwen, 2015). HR graduates need courses that enhance employability skills for career development (Minten & Forsyth 2014).

Coetzee and Beukes (2010) identified employability as an essential element to career satisfaction and success in the current unpredictable and extremely disorganised business environment. Stakeholders in South African are increasingly concerned with employability of young people and are focusing on measures to increase and sustain employability measures (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013; Marock, 2008).

It can be observed in identifying the factors that these terms can be used interchangeably. Like employability, career success is influenced by factors to mention educational level (Becker, 1964; Ng & Feldman, 2014); salary and size of the organisation (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Kraimer *et al.*, 2011); culture (Holtschlag, et al 2013); legislation (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002); personality (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001); gender and age (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Mora & Ruiz-Castillo, 2003), among other variables.

In their study, De Vos and De Hauw (2010) found perceived career success to be influenced by employability. Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006) in De Vos and De Hauw (2010) noted that career success is attainable by pursuing lifetime employability, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies. Minten and Forsyth (2014) suggested that an individual will reinvent their career at times, in response to personal and environmental changes.

Minten and Forsyth, (2014) in their study of sports graduates, found it to be complex as the graduates possessed characteristics of traditional, boundaryless, protean and bounded careers which were influenced by the individual's needs, aspirations, values and the nature of the occupation in which they work. De Vos and Hauw (2010) sought to determine whether competency development and perceived support for competency development relate significantly to employability, marketability and career satisfaction. Their findings revealed that employability has a significant relationship to marketability and career satisfaction.

3.7.1 Sector specific employability

Employability literature combines employability skills and there is a lack of literature on discipline-specific employability. However, sector-specific lack of employability is not unique as accounting programmes were also criticised for producing graduates who are not well equipped to meet the changes of the business environment (Naidoo et al. (nd). Careers for sports graduates are argued to be dynamic, as there are numerous career options for the graduates after university exit (Minten & Forsyth, 2014).

Curriculums are essential for professions but they do not solve all matters regarding work entry (Raybould, & Sheedy, 2005; Watty *et al.*, 2014). HR graduates' ultimate objective is to add value to organisations they join, as illustrated by Giannantonio and Hurley (2002). However, this claim is challenged by a number of HR professionals who began their careers with no HR qualification and thus have developed their knowledge, skills and abilities in diverse ways.

Previously, HR degrees were not essential for a career in HR. This challenge is not unique to HR as Minten and Forsyth's (2014) findings presented a similar context in which most sport graduates were misplaced as they were in jobs they had not studied for.

As HR strives for professionalism and recognition at the boardroom table, the value of HR qualifications must be cemented to avoid everyone from being an HR professional. At the entry level of the profession, HR professionals must possess technical HR knowledge. In the HR context, employers expect HR degrees to equip professionals with skills they pose to offer (Johnson & King 2002). Competencies required in HR today and for the future are HR specific (Cohen, 2015) although the competencies are criticised for being broad in relation to leadership, management and behaviours.

A variety of reasons exist for the HR education agenda; employers hire HR graduates as they require them to transform organisations from an HR perspective (Cohen, 2015). There is a gap in South Africa concerning the curricula of competencies. The SABPP is the body responsible for quality assurance and certification of HR qualifications, and the findings of the study will be used as benchmark in South Africa (SAQA, SABPP 2015). The SABPP competency model can be used to inform curriculum development, not only in HR but other sectors can test the model's (SABPP competency model) relevance to HR practitioner context.



HR is both technical and strategic and in order for HR to master the technical and strategic components, professionalism, education and expertise are required. Such skills and competence must be cultivated, taught and developed (Cohen, 2015). Knowledge, traits, and motives are crucial to the challenges surrounding the design of a competency-based curriculum (McEvoy et al 2005). The identification of behavioural and HR leadership competencies is the first step and must be cemented with continuous assessment of competencies by making use of the various support tools and development activities. These are gaps that exist in early HR and professionals concur that such must be addressed (Cohen, 2015).

Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) recommended that academics must continuously adjust curricula to offer knowledge which exists with the business and HR community. They proposed teaching students how to manage change, as the work environment is susceptible to change. In their study, Johnson and King (2002) sought to identify essential competencies deemed essential for HR/IR practitioners, by evaluating how adequately academic programmes develop the competencies. They found that the programmes were doing a sufficient job but advised that they should be more aggressive for competency development. Van Eynde and Tucker (1997)

found that HR executives are content with the major topics covered by the HR curricula and with the fact that the topics are being appropriately covered.

Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) challenged HR academics to direct learners on the essential links between implementing successful HR programmes, and achieving desired HR and organisational outcomes such as performance and satisfaction. Cohen (2015) said she regards higher education in HRM as essential as it makes people effective in HR roles, but she goes on to state that education alone is not enough as it needs to be cemented by experience which can be acquired as people develop their skills within a field. An academic qualification, practical experience and personal development are the building blocks of a professional career (Cohen 2015; Mansfield, 1996; Rothwell, & Arnold, 2007). These equip one to face greater challenges in the field.

Menci et al. (2010) highlighted the lack of empirical studies that examine the effectiveness of various undergraduate programmes in addressing HR content areas. Their research goal was to address this need by exploring the perceptions of graduates of three different human resources management undergraduate programmes and identify their level of proficiency. Their study compared three existing undergraduate human resources management programmes based on the perceptions of their human resources management alumni who had entered the human resources field. Their findings suggest that existing curricula should be continuously reviewed by the Faculties responsible for teaching HRM. This as to ensure the learner is provided with adequate knowledge of the core content areas recommended for HR professionals by the SHRM. In the South African context, the SABPP has the mandate of pushing the HR agenda forward.

Driving towards sector specific employability (HR), the researcher was mindful of the opinion that the first step to consider which methodology to utilise in the study was to identify the generic employability traits, knowledge and attributes for general employability and then move to sector-specific employability, as this would also gain consensus around the generic employability skills required by South African employers. In seeking to answer the research question, the first step needed to be from a holistic orientation and to give merits for the methodology adopted and to cater for weaknesses of competency models focusing on senior personnel and forgetting those who seek to enter the profession. To further the argument, the researcher then proposes that getting a solid foundation for those entering the profession will also ensure continuity which is found to be lacking. As stated in Chapter 2, many gaps

regarding the continuity of studies remain a challenge for the profession. Serim (2014) found that employees' perceptions regarding the relevance and fairness of competency models have a positive effect on employability outcomes and organisational citizenship behaviour.

3.8 GENERIC EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

With generic employability skills, there is no confinement to a single workplace or discipline, they are transferable (Paadi, 2014). Soft skills and hard skills are complementary in nature, they form the technical requirements for work which students are trained for. The definition of soft skills is dependent on context and subject (Schulz, 2008). Soft skills are also known as generic skills, core skills, key skills or 'transferable skills' (Salleh, Sulaiman & Talib, 2010). One who embarks on a career in HR in order for them to be employable and attain greater success in their profession, must be equipped with soft and hard skills (Salleh, *et al.*, 2010). The hard skills for HR were identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Robles (2012) advocated for continuous development of soft skills and this is attained by ongoing practical application in everyday life and the workplace. Tertiary education learners must make conscious decisions to understand the work process and an integration of manual and intellectual tasks. Employability skills enable learners to acquire specific knowledge and technical skills needed for the workplace. Higher education must provide learners with practical tips on how to use their initiative, and how to be adaptable and flexible for employability in the ever-changing market of jobs (Pavelka, 2014). Through continued systematic teaching, universities ensure that from the first day of school till people acquire work, they develop necessary skills (Muñoz & Díaz, 2014).

Knowledge can be categorised into substantive and enabling knowledge. Substantive knowledge is the subject matter of a field or discipline while enabling knowledge represents the skills individuals possess that allow them to apply their substantive knowledge (Giannantonio & Hurley, 2002; Hansen et al. 1996). From this assertion it can be observed that academia/HR programmes focus on substantive knowledge rather than enabling knowledge.

Employability skills are the skills, knowledge and abilities of university graduates, which extend beyond disciplinary content knowledge (Naidoo, *et al.*, nd). Employability skills development is the human capital theory, which states 'employability' is not only about shaping talent, techniques, and experience for an individual to get a job, but more toward the ability to do the work (Rasul, Rauf, Mansor, Yasin & Mahamod, 2013). Regardless of the job in question, some of the most sought-after skills are related to interpersonal relations,

adaptability and negotiation skills (Martín, 2014). Table 3.1 below is a synthesis of the generic employability skills identified in literature.

Table 3.1: Generic employability skills

Author	Soft skills
Spill, (2002); Employment and skills UKCES, (2009)	Communication skills, oral presentation, and written communication, ability to develop and sustain a logical argument and defend that argument in a reasonable manner listening and active listening.
Lowden, Hall, Elliot and Lewin, (2011)	A positive attitude, self-management, team work, business and customer awareness, problem solving, communication and literacy, application of numeracy and application of information technology.
Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac, and Lawton, (2012)	Entrepreneurship and enterprise, an innovative approach, creativity, collaboration and risk taking.
Precision consultancy (2007)	Communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-management, planning and organising, technology, lifelong learning, and initiative and enterprise
Employment and Skills UKCES, (2009).	A positive approach, using numbers effectively, using language effectively, using information technology (IT) effectively, self-management, thinking and solving problems, working together and communicating, and an understanding the business.
Singh and Singh, (2009)	Communication skills; English language proficiency; information; communication and technology skill; interpersonal skills; ability to work as a team; leadership skills; problem solving skills; adaptability skills; risk taking skills; creativity skills; personal organisation and time management skills.
Coetzee, (2012)	Interactive skills: problem-solving and decision-making skills: continuous learning orientation: enterprising skills: presenting and applying information skills: goal-directed behaviour: ethical and responsible behaviour: and/or workplace in all one does, Analytical Thinking Skills.
Rasul, Rauf, Mansor, Yasin & Mahamod, 2013	Text reading skills, using a document, writing, numbers, communicate with thinking skills, working with others, using computers and continuous learning.

Technology is continuously changing and is continuously being incorporated in the place of work. Employees with the technology skills are required in today's job market since they are valuable in understanding the importance of technology usage in eHRM. Soft skills are also evolving with time as previously computer literacy and other attributes were regarded a

sufficient. In the current context, one is advised to go beyond the traditional employability skill and to be entrepreneurial to create employment. Skills are essential as they better the function of economies, a weakness of the South African education system is found in Van Der Berg and Van Broekhuizen (2012) who criticise it as it fails to produce the great skills required by employers. Soft skills such as leadership, communication, team building and entrepreneurial interest have become critical for hiring and promoting employees to key positions (Yassin, et al., 2008), but are not being addressed by the education system.

3.9 CAREER SUCCESS

To attain career success, an individual must be able to translate what they learnt at university so as to accomplish the demands of work (Abderhalden, Snyder, & Evans, 2016; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017; Weisz & Smith, 2005; Knight, & Yorke, 2004). In light of this, putting theory into practice is a priority for HR. The debate in career success revolves around the two types of success, which are subjective and objective (Abele, Hagmaier, & Spurk, 2016; Spurk, Keller, & Hirschi, 2016). The way employees feel about their work will influence the level and quality of their work, with implications for organisational productivity and performance (Heslin & Turban, 2016; Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016; Spurk, Keller & Hirschi, 2016; Zhu, Cooper, Fan & De Cieri, 2013). Career success has different meanings depending on career path, industry demands or changes in the economic structure (Whitehead, 2001). The lack of a concise definition to career success is escalated by scholars who view objective and subjective success directly and the influence each type has over the other. Career success can be viewed in relation to the following dichotomies: objective or subjective; alternatively, intrinsic or extrinsic (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Shockley *et al.*, 2016; Spurk *et al.*, 2016). Gunz and Heslin (2005) viewed the term career success as a multi-faceted concept as it is influenced by both subjective and objective components. One school of thought proffers that objective career success affects subjective career success, while some believe in the opposite, and the last group believes the two are interdependent (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Okay-Somerville, & Scholarios, 2017).

3.9.1 Objective/extrinsic career

This is also known as extrinsic career success as the constructs can be objectively observed, as noted in Seibert and Kraimer (2001). Objective career success is a reflection of status and observable positions (Abderhalden, *et al.*, 2016; Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Dodangoda, & Arachchige, 2017; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017; Sultana, Yousaf, Khan & Saeed, 2016).

Objective career success is measured in terms of hierarchical status, salary, salary growth and promotions (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Gu, & Su, 2016). Rosikiewicz, DiRenzo, & Greenhaus, 2016; Spurk, Keller, & Hirschi, 2016), which are observable accomplishments (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). On the other hand, an individual's internal evaluation and dimensions are those that they regard as essential to their work location, status, progression through different jobs, income, access to learning, the importance of work versus personal, family time and employment security (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). These may involve occupation, family situation, mobility, task attributes, income, and job level concerned with social role and official position. Extrinsic career success refers to outcomes that are instrumental rewards from the job or occupation and are objectively observable (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001).

3.9.2 Subjective/Intrinsic career success

Subjective career success measures career satisfaction, comparative judgments, or job satisfaction (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Dodangoda, & Arachchige, 2017; Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, 2017; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017). Intrinsic career success is dependent on the individual's subjective evaluation relative to their goals and expectations (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). These can be feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment regarding the individual's career (De Vos & De Hauw, 2010; Teodorescu, Furnham, & MacRae, 2017; Zaman, Hashim, & Osman-Gani, 2016). Members of different social categories (white males, women, minorities, secretaries, doctors) do not necessarily share the same subjective career orientation (Arthur *et al.*, 2005), mainly because it is dependent on the individual. Subjective career or intrinsic career success reflects an individual's personal accomplishments which are the less tangible indicators of their career situation (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Arthur *et al.*, 2005). This type of career success is highly influenced/dependant on the person's own evaluation in relation to personal goals and set expectations (Dai, & Song, 2016; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001).

Subjective career success encompasses factors from outside the career, thus Parker and Chusmir (1991) named their conception of the construct "life success; personal fulfilment", and they identified "status/wealth, contribution to society, family relationships, and security" as relevant factors. Employees are more concerned in attaining personal goals rather than those of the organisation. They attain the latter by making use of meta-competencies which allow employees to move easily between employers (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). Table

3.2 is an illustration of the factors which influence the constructs of career success (objective and subjective).

Table 3.2: Factors influencing objective and subjective career success

Author	Objective career factors	Subjective career factors
Martins et al. (2002)	Autonomy, power, Financial outcomes, career advancement.	Advancement satisfaction, Career satisfaction.
Tharenou (2001)	Promotion supervising others, less time without managerial, promotions, years' Salary, position type, span of control.	n/a
Judiesch and Lyness (1999)	salary increase, performance rating Hierarchical level, salary, promotion.	n/a
Campion et al. (1994)	Rate and salary growth, career progression outcomes, promotion.	Career outcomes, knowledge and skill outcomes, career management.
Harris et al. (2001)	Congruence, tenure.	Job satisfaction, social support.
O'Reilly III and Chatman (1994)	Selection success, number of job offers, increment, and number of promotions current salary, salary.	Occupational Commitment.
Chao et al. (1994)	Personal income.	Adaptability, job satisfaction, identity resolution, Career Involvement.
Lyness and Thompson (1997)	Organisational stature, compensation, developmental opportunities.	Compensation opportunities, satisfaction with Satisfaction with career.
Wallace (2001)	Earnings.	work–nonworking conflict in the profession, met expectations, career satisfaction, intent to stay integration with fellow co-workers, procedural justice, sense of social, Perceived promotional opportunities.
Burlew and Johnson (1992)	n/a	personal growth support, opportunities for barriers in career, peers.

Adopted and modified from Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, (2005) 184-190

The duality and interdependence of subjective career success and objective career success make each relevant to the other, and likely to influence the other over time (Johnston & Phelan, 2016; Mulhall, 2016; Yao & Thorn, 2016). Workers now aim for satisfaction related to intrinsic rewards whereby there is a deeper fulfilment of personal values and ideals (Varshne, 2013). Objective career success affects subjective career success; thus they are interdependent (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). Hall (2004), in an overview of his contribution to career literature, noted freedom and growth as the core values. The way individuals are satisfied with their work and life is more important than rather than fame, power and money.

3.10 FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER SUCCESS

Career success, as observed from the literature, can be motivated by personal desires, group affiliations, culture and the dynamics of the employment relationships. Scholars have observed human capital, demographics, industry, and organisational factors as antecedents that influence career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; and Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Literature has identified a number of promotions, salary increases, or scales of career satisfaction as the main variables of career success (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). Individuals value different career aspirations, and place emphasis on factors such as progression through different jobs, access to learning, income, employment, security, the location of work, status, the importance of work versus personal and family time.

The organisation, occupational and cultural contexts have also been observed to influence career success (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). It has been empirically proven that individuals who display behaviours associated with a boundaryless career report higher levels of career success (Arthur *et al.*, 2005).

Gender



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Traditional occupations are those that have been previously occupied by a man (Bagilhole, 2002). Although measures of redress against discrimination/inequalities have been put in place, (Abele *et al.*, 2016; Frederiksen & Kato, 2017; Grint, 1988) discrimination, although rare, still exists. Not much data is available on females who occupy leadership positions in Africa. (Nkomo, & Ngambi, 2009). This is so as some occupations have also been identified to be characterised by gender stereotyping. Feminists have been central in the drive for women to enter the workforce and occupy strategic positions. In the African context most women are employed in the agricultural sector (Nkomo, & Ngambi, 2009). Consequently, women find it difficult to break the glass ceiling (SABPP, 2015; Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010).

Women end up encountering resistance, hence affecting their career progression, especially to more top positions (Littrell & Nkomo, 2005). Oguntoyinbo, (2014) revealed that women expressed their dissatisfaction on how they are underrepresented especially in more senior positions, yet they know they can contribute as much as their counterparts (Mittal & Sharma, 2015).

Regardless of the numerous drives for women to enter the workforce, inequalities still exist and literature on African women in leadership is even sparse (Nkomo, & Ngambi, 2009).

Women in the labour market still occupy lower levels in hierarchy, receive lower wages or salary, have lower status and less authority (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Zhu *et al.*, 2016). Mora and Ruiz-Castillo (2003) in their study for the period 1977 and 1992, noted that as the levels of education and age increase, the levels of segregation decrease. In some instances, HR is considered a profession for females; however, due to the glass ceiling, women will likely be occupying the lower level positions. In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998 was put in place to redress such stereotypical aligning of occupations.

Personality

Seibert and Kraimer, (2001) also found the big five personality traits to explain significant variance in career success and such a finding was consistent with other literature. Literature on career success has shown the direct relationship to personality factors, with the big five traits being related to intrinsic and extrinsic career success (Abele *et al.*, 2016; Gelissen, de Graaf, 2006; Spurk, Keller & Hirschi, 2016; Turban, Moake, Wu, & Cheung, 2017; Yang, & Chau, 2016). Gelissen, de Graaf (2006) did not find any association between personality traits but noted that personality matters cannot be rejected in career success. Seibert and Kraimer (2001) argued that personality is weakly related to salary. The definition of competencies also embraces the personal characteristics which are required. There is a lack of literature which distinctively identifies the personal characteristics required in the profession.

Legislation

Legislation is a factor which influences career success, as policies can be a barrier to or enhance career success (Baruch, Humbert, & Wilson, 2016; Chinyamurindi, 2016; Santos, 2016; Zhu, *et al.*, 2016). In the South African context, equity legislation has been put in place. The previous social system of apartheid discriminated along race and gender lines. Historically, careers have been oriented along gender lines. In the South African context, occupational segregation by sex is extensive in all economic sectors but it varies over time and by place (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Van Wyk, Naidoo, Moodley, & Higgins-Opitz, 2016). In light of this, legislation can hinder people's success if most top positions are reserved for the designated groups. It can also accelerate progression as organisations seek to meet the quotas set by the state.

Culture

As career success is diverse, it can be explored from a cultural perspective. Holtschlag, Morales, Masuda and Maydeu-Olivares (2013) looked into career success from a cultural

perspective and they observed that few studies had examined the antecedents of career success across cultures. Holtschlag et al. (2013) observed that individuals of a culture which practised high self enhancement values had a greater chance of obtaining hierarchical status. Individuals with a ‘go-getting’ attitude and are achievement-seeking are generally more likely to make it to the top. Culture in this study was adopted to identify the collective culture among professionals. The HR ‘culture’ provides a sense of identity and belonging to the profession means conforming to the set standards. However, organisations have their own culture and HR practitioners must collectively fuse these cultures to achieve success. Creating a culture of winning has merit for the profession and organisations.

Salary/ financial and organisation size

Seibert and Kraimer, (2001) in their study found the size of an organisation was positively related to salary. Salary is considered essential to individuals and organisations as it can enhance standard of living, improve social status and boost self-esteem and overall life satisfaction. Ng and Feldman (2014) in their study found that low socioeconomic status, being female, being non-Caucasian, and being married are associated with lower salary attainment. Low cognitive ability, low core self-evaluations were negatively related to salary among all correlates, which also influence salary satisfaction levels (Ng & Feldman, 2014). Lack of mentorship and poor working relations with supervisors were found to have a negative relationship to salary attainment (Ng & Feldman (2014). Investment in a positive attitude was identified as a reason for low earnings. Low intrinsic job motivation, low job involvement, low work centrality, and low occupational commitment were found to be negatively related to salary attainment. Individuals who showed no interest in career development were also unlikely to accrue higher wages (Ng & Feldman (2014). The location of the organisation was also found to be related positively to salary (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001).

Unfavourable work environments impede individuals' efforts to attain higher salaries in poorly designed jobs. Environment hurdles include low career-related organisational support, role conflict, unmet expectations, and outcome unfairness (Bozionelos *et al.*, 2016; Kraimer *et al.*, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Westring, McDonald, Carr, & Grisso, 2016).

Educational level

Education level and quality are extremely important stepping stones for bidding up a salary. Low university reputation, and low grade point are factors which negatively affect salary

attainment (Becker, 1964; Ng & Feldman, 2014). Education is also crucial as it plays a vital role in not only enhancing employability and but in preparation and success (Finch *et al.*, 2016).

Ng et al. (2005) synthesised literature and used four descriptors to classify factors which influence career success: Human capital (educational, job tenure, organisation tenure, work experience personal, education level, career planning, political knowledge and skills, and social capital and professional experiences); organisational sponsorship (supervisor support, training and skill development opportunities, and organisational resources); socio-demographic predictors of individuals' demographic and social backgrounds which include gender, race (White vs. non-White), marital status (married vs. not married), and age); dispositional traits (big five personality factors, proactivity, locus of control (cognitive ability)).

3.11 THE TRADITIONAL CAREER AND NEW CAREER

A traditional career path is characterised by stability and linear to one organisation, whereas the modern path is transitional, dynamic, and may involve numerous occupations and organisations (Varshne, 2013). De Vos and De Hauw (2010) purported that traditional career researchers mainly put emphasis on the objective indicators of career success, among them being promotion and salary growth. In the literature, traditional careers are portrayed to follow a rigid hierarchical structure in organisations which are operated in stable environments. Traditional careers are presumed to be predictable, secure, and linear (Baruch, 2006). Traditional careers are centred on the hierarchy and moving up the ladder is an indicator of progression. It is also characterised by stiff competition as there are limited prospects for promotion. Most organisational structures depend on context to support this structure.

Minten and Forsyth, (2014) identified the protean career and the boundaryless career as the main career theories associated with the new career. Constructs of these theories have informed career theory for years (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006). Careers have shifted from organisational careers to boundaryless or protean careers (Hoekstra, 2011). Protean and boundaryless careers examine advantages and disadvantages of numerous career orientations; as they are the accepted metaphors in career theory (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Literature clearly differentiates between the two theories (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Briscoe et al 2006; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Some scholars note that a protean career only involves psychological changes whilst a boundaryless career involves physical changes in work arrangements. The separation of objective and subjective career does not take into

consideration the interdependence of the physical and psychological career worlds (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The effect of the separation is the lack of applicability to individuals who take into account the physical and psychological issues.

Protean career

Hall (1996) coined the term protean career (Hall, 2004; Minten & Forsyth, 2014); he looked at a career from a person’s psychological success in their work (Minten & Forsyth, 2014). The individual’s core values drive career decisions (Hall, 2004). The protean career is driven by people pursuing their own values. A career is thus defined in terms of motives, which are the values an individual has as a career is a self-directed approach (Briscoe & Hall, 2002).

The protean career is value driven or self-directed in personal and career management (Minten & Forsyth, 2014; 96). Value driven refers to internal values which provide guidance and measure a person’s career. The latter refers to the ability to adapt to performance and learning demands. With reference to HR practitioners and the study, values are the intangibles or individual characteristics which guide people as they progress in their career. These are essential as when grouped collectively they give practitioners a sense of belonging as they may not be unique to the person.



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Table 3.3: Protean career and traditional careers

Issue	Protean career	Traditional career
Who’s in charge?	Person	Organisation
Core values	Freedom and growth	Advancement
Degree of mobility	High	Lower
Success criteria	Psychological success	Position, level, salary
Key attitudes	Work satisfaction, professional commitment	Organisational commitment

Hall 2004: 4 The protean career: A quarter-century journey

Boundaryless career

Boundaryless careers are characterised by inter-firm mobility. They are unpredictable and add to the narrative around subjective career success (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Eby, 2001; De Vos & De Hauw, 2010). This gives personal meaning to the term career success. The term was coined by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) who argued that a person develops a successful career through upwards, downwards and spiral moves across job roles, employers, industries, and, with increasing globalisation, countries. These movements in the hierarchy are argued to provide opportunities for learning and development, increasing the currency of an individual's

skills and work experience, and consequently their employability (Eby, 2001; Minten & Forsyth, 2014).

A career consists of ambiguous duties in an organisation and gives departmental identity (Miner & Robinson's (1994). As for HR, a career is contextualised by being in the HR department within an organisation. DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) attributed success to how individuals take advantage of the countless opportunities that present themselves through working life. Managing a boundaryless career requires an individual to seek out and contract personally fulfilling work (Varshne, 2013). Boundaryless career behaviour is associated with high levels of career success (Arthur *et al.*, 2005).

Arthur *et al.* (2005) declared a new career as significant in career theory because it looks at inter-organisational mobility which is a break away from the psychological contract. Boundaryless careers move to accept the effects of the current employment market, which implies organisations are no longer able to provide lifetime employment. Parties in the employment relationship are aware that the employment relationship will not last for a lifetime success, as individuals migrate for various reasons.

Although the world of work is rapidly evolving and shifting towards the new career, traditional careers still exist. However, it does not mean that jobs are guaranteed. New careers are highly transitory in nature and are characterised by job hopping in different organisations. The stigma associated with transitional careers has been eroded in recent times.

New career

Hoekstra (2011) explained that the process of career development is an interactive process involving internal career identity formation. The current job environment is characterised with limited job opportunities and technological advances (Abas-Mastura, Imam & Osman, 2013). Only a small number of companies are able to guarantee the long-term or medium-term employment of their worker (Blanco, 2014). In South Africa, the environment is characterised by similar characteristics; however, the imbalances of the previous dispensation further exacerbate the employment issues.

This makes careers unpredictable, vulnerable, and multidirectional (Baruch, 2006). The world we live in is more complex than before. Like employability, career success has been modified by globalisation, organisational restructuring and economic pressures (Varshne, 2013; Baruch, 2006; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). There is consensus in career and business literature on the

dynamic nature of the labour market (Baruch, 2006). Where one starts, does not necessarily determine where one ends. The onus is on the employee to determine their mobility, and they are thus self-directed (Varshne, 2013). Thus, Seibert and Kraimer (2001) encouraged employees to take on increased responsibility for managing their own careers. The dynamics of modern day careers are no longer bounded to a single organisation, but have become a series of short learning stages as workers need to be highly adaptable, and manage multiple identities.

3.12 THEORIES OF CAREER SUCCESS

The researcher also examined the theory of work adjustment and the career construction theory. The theory of work adjustment was adopted for this study as it takes into consideration the abilities required to perform in an organisation – in essence to the study, the skills and abilities required within HR. On the other hand, the career construction theory was adopted for its focus on experiences which shape a career. In light of the dynamic South African context, the theory is key from employability to career success due to how the environment shapes the experiences of individuals.

3.12.1 Theory of work adjustment



The theory of work adjustment was developed by Dawis, England and Lofquist in 1960. The theory has been modified over the years. After modification, the theory had four major psychological constructs: ability; reinforcement values; satisfaction and person-environment correspondence (Dawis, 1994; Hesketh, 1995; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). The theory emphasises the relationship between the parties in the employment relationship. The more aligned individuals' abilities (skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours) are to the prerequisites of an organisation, the greater the chance for them to perform well on the job and in a manner regarded as satisfactory by an employer. Bayl-Smith and Griffin (2015) noted that the theory simply looks at how people maintain (jobs) and adjust to suit their work environment. Whereas Hesketh (1995) declared the person-work environment correspondence and adjustment during adulthood as the primary purpose of the theory.

Employers set tasks which employees must execute in order for them to meet their objectives and employees must possess the abilities to perform the tasks. Employees require a wage/compensation in a comfortable and safe work environment. This interaction continues as employees uphold their values and employers reinforce their needs. Work adjustment is the process of achieving and maintaining correspondence. Leading to satisfaction are the skills and abilities necessary to meet the requirements of an occupation (Hesketh, 1995).

According to Leung (2008), a person looks for work in an organisation or environment which meets their needs and organisations take those people who have capabilities which meet organisational requirements. In order to adjust, activeness, reactivity, perseverance and flexibility are required (Leung, 2008). The term activeness or pace refers to how keen a person is inclined to change or perform in the environment to limit dis-correspondence and dissatisfaction; reactivity or rhythm looks at how a person resorts to self-adjustment in dealing with dis-correspondence without altering the environment; perseverance or endurance is the extent to which a person perseveres to resolve, adjust and be accommodating before they prefer to leave an environment. Flexibility is the celerity in an individual's tolerance levels to the environment dis-correspondence; it looks at how one becomes dissatisfied with the environment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Hesketh, 1995; Leung, 2008; Bayl-Smith, & Griffin, 2015).

Harper and Shoffner (2004) used the theory to address career counselling for those who had retired. They found that counsellors who work with retirees must explore post-retirement plans in order to deal with the challenges of later life. A career counsellor can help the retired to identify values, needs, skills, abilities, and the personality which they can match. The weakness of the work adjustment theory is that it fails to provide one with recent relevant information of the world of work. The theory also fails to provide for voluntary activities that one takes part in.

The theory of work adjustment, according to Dawes, (1994) focuses on abilities and skills which are distinguished from each other. Skills are regarded as observed; zero ordered variables and abilities are inferred factors. Human skills can be cognitive, perceptual, psychomotor, physical, social and affective (Dawes, 1994). Bayl-Smith and Griffin (2015), in their study, cemented the work adjustment theory as they found that work style had a positive relationship with conscientiousness and work engagement yet was unrelated to stress. The active work style had a positive relationship to being demands-abilities fit, but not needs-supplies fit.

3.12.2 Career construction theory

The career construction theory incorporates personal/subjective experiences and provides a way of thinking about how individuals choose and use work. It looks at how people shape their lives and careers and it aids them in developing a cohesive identity, environment adaptation and career construction in their work life (Del Corso & Rehfuess, 2011). The theory

adopts a framework in which peoples' needs, interests, abilities and values arise. The narration is subjective and allows people to use their own language and meaning (Bujold, 2004). Savickas et al. (2009) stressed that the narrative approach to career counselling relies on what individuals have gone through in their work life which they regard as a meaningful resource which can be used for further life designing and building. They further reason that in the career construction theory, narratives are an explorative and developmental activity which can be built from experiences or other contributing variables. Thus, Super, Savickas and Super (1996) maintain that the working life of individuals unfolds through a series of career mini-cycles.

The theory looks into career development and career counselling from a constructivist and narrative perspective. Vocational psychologists and career counsellors use narrative career assessments to tell their career story rather than the traditional method of career assessment. Attitudes, beliefs and competencies are related to career adaptability from the actors' perspective and are used to identify challenging areas of a career.

According to the theory, the counsellor intervenes where one struggles by identifying areas of concern, control, curiosity, or confidence. This is a holistic, comprehensive and practical method as it equips people with adaptation skills (Corso & Rehfuß, 2011). This in turn allows for a holistic approach on how, what and why people construct their careers with no divisions (Savickas, 2005). These life themes that drive behaviour counsellors can help individuals identify their vocational personality and career adaptability obstacles (Del Corso & Rehfuß, 2011).

3.12.3 Theory synthesis

The meaning of career success for practitioners can be derived from the career construction theory. The theory provides a holistic orientation to career success. The subjective experiences are essential as collectively they will help identify the keys behaviours and traits in an HR career. From the above discussion it can be observed that the theories adopted, although contradictory, take a holistic view on career success. The theories start from traditional point and move to a boundaryless one. This section was deemed essential to observe the mobility of taking into consideration the changes taking place in the world of work. Taking the greener pastures narrative and size of organisation into account, firm mobility is a high expectation amongst HR practitioners. Traditional careers likely still exist as there are individuals who are loyal and stay within their firms and move up their hierarchy as a token of their loyalty. On the other hand, the theory of work adjustment focuses on the parties in the employment relationship

and takes into account the journey in the career of the employee as it considers their personal experience as they narrate their career story.

3.13 CONCLUSION

Education is one of the most important methods in developing the qualities and the characteristics of personnel to match the requirements of the businesses in the country (Sermsuk *et al.*, 2014). There is a need to develop employability from the very start of formal education (Granda-Piñán, Sahuquillo, & Cánovas, 2014). Employability skills must be prioritised equally, rather than giving one skill preference over the other. It is essential for universities to respond strongly yet strategically to the employability issue. The onus is on employees to acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for a career choice. Employability is about work and the ability to be employed (Hillage & Pollard 1998). Horn (2006) argued that the individuals who have new skills can cope with the challenges required to drive the economy in South Africa.

The term, employability, has been used generously in a range of meanings, thus the lack of clarity of what employability actually is. Most definitions usually focus on the supply side (university) and the new era has broadened the term to include capabilities and sustaining employment. The following chapter examines the variable career success, although new employability expands to include career success.

Models selected in the study are relevant as the Fugate and Kinicki disposal model of employability (2004) requires employees to adapt to work conditions. The competence-based model supports the RBV theory and thus is relevant in identifying the sector-specific employability. The career edge model by Pool and Sewell (2007) is graduate oriented and incorporates new employability and lifelong learning. Challenges of employability and stakeholders of employability, among others, were discussed in this chapter. The term is universal; however, sector-specific employability will remain a challenge as there are graduates in non-graduate jobs and there is a need for the HR professional body to create a centralised database specifically for HR graduates.

Horn (2006) viewed 'new' skills required for the previously disadvantaged groups to include proficiency in mathematics, computing, reading, writing and reasoning; the ability to use resources and information constructively; interpersonal skills; the ability to understand systems and to master technology; as well as the flexibility to cope with change in the

workplace (Horn, 2006;118). These skills are required as they are key to driving the South African economy.

A career is an individual's work journey and is part of their identity (Hoekstra 2011). From the above discussion it can be observed that there are numerous factors influencing career success – summarised in objective (intrinsic) and subjective (extrinsic) terms. This chapter defined the term career success and identified the factors and constructs which influence career success. The researcher assessed theory and noted the intertwined nature of the term. In as much as there can be different definitions and notions to the term, the researcher noted that it is recommended to collate due to the complicated nature of the work world. As highlighted in literature, times are changing and thus there are numerous standpoints by which one can define career success. The term can be viewed from an individual or organisational perspective. The researcher looked into the overall definition of career success rather than a sector-specific approach for the following reasons:

- The HR competencies were identified and comprehensively addressed in the preceding chapter.
- The researcher takes heed of warning by Baruch (2006) who advised scholars to refrain from approaching career studies from the limited perspective of a single discipline. The depth of the career success construct can be better seen by looking through both lenses at the same time (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005).

At this stage, it is relevant to present the research questions:

What are the human resources competencies needed for employability and career success?

and

How do human resources practitioners evaluate the SABPP competency model concerning their work within the South African context?

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research methodology used to address the research questions raised. An exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design was adopted, employing a research instrument with open-ended questions and interviews. The qualitative approach sought to understand phenomena from the perspective of participants immersed with HR-related experiences.

The study sought to identify the competencies deemed as crucial to HR employability and subsequently career success and to assess the applicability of the SABPP competency model. The researcher made use of the qualitative research paradigm. Philosophies underpinning the research design were deliberated upon and are discussed in this chapter. Thematic analysis and the logic behind the use of such a technique are highlighted (Bryman, 2012). The design of a research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm (Joubish *et al.*, 2011).

4.2 KEY TERMS



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Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are the major philosophical dimensions of the research process (TerreBlanche & Durrheim, 1999). Joubish *et al.* (2011) agreed and noted that the paradigm framework is comprised of philosophy, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology and rhetoric were identified by Johnson and Christensen (2008:32). In the philosophical discipline, the concept looks at the nature and structure of “reality.” From the literature synthesis, ontology, epistemology and methodology were identified as the key themes which emerged. These themes determine the philosophical choices to be adopted by a scholar.

4.2.1 Ontology

Guarino, Ober and Staab (2009) declared that the term ontology is used differently within scholar communities and thus has diverse meanings. It also has different jargon to define it and numerous overlapping concepts, structures and methods (Uschold & Gruninger, 1996). Ontology in philosophy deals with the nature of reality and truth (Johnson & Christensen 2008; Guarino *et al.*, 2009). In metaphysics, ontology studies the attributes which belong to things because of their very nature (Guarino *et al.*, 2009). In computer science, ontology refers to a

special kind of information or object. Ontology is a formal, explicit specification of a shared understanding of a domain of interest (Uschold & Gruninger, 1996; Guarino *et al.*, 2009). A set of concepts conceives one world view (Usehold & Gruninger, 1996).

The researchers' ontological assumptions were guided by the qualitative orientation. Constructivism is the social phenomenon adopted as meanings in the study were based on the continuous accomplishments of the actors (HR practitioners). This further justifies the interpretative approach being adopted.

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is a tool used to present criticism to a common-sense approach. This is linked to methodology as well (Tennis, 2008). Creswell (1994) endorsed that epistemology seeks to answer the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Epistemology is a branch of philosophy dealing with knowledge and its justification (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In any discipline, in the absence of epistemology, scientific reflection is impossible. Epistemology is simplified to the ways of knowing and how we know (Tennis 2008; Wenning 2009; Tennis 2008).



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Common terms which emerge in determining the type of knowledge in epistemology are instrumental, empiricist, rationalist, pragmatic, operationalist, referential, realist, and positivistic. Each identified theme has an influence on the type of knowledge it produces. This is so as the epistemic stances have a systematic view on reality, our knowledge of it, and the meaning we can ascribe to it (Tennis, 2008).

From a historical perspective, epistemology has responded to the following questions:

- What does knowledge mean and what is meant by saying you know something?
- Where does knowledge come from, and is that source reliable?
- What are the limitations and scope of knowledge? (Wenning, 2009:5)

From the above it is evident that epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and what we accept as being valid knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The study was not premised on producing replicable findings, but the researcher selected a method which is scientifically sound. Findings from the study confirmed literature and either confirmed or criticised existing theory. A strict criteria to select the participants of the study was adhered to so as to ensure data would be reliable.

4.2.3 Methodology

Collis and Hussey (2003) referred to research methodology as the overall approach to the research process, from the theoretical underpinning to the collection and analysis of the data. On the other hand, Johnson and Christensen (2008:32) pronounced methodology as the identification, study, and justification of research methods. A methodology in general is the approach adopted by an investigator to examine a phenomenon. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2006) viewed research methodology as a simple framework that shows methods and procedures one follows when collecting and analysing data for a study. This section is essential in a study as it follows a scientific orientation which guides a researcher on the steps to be followed in carrying out the research (Babbie, Halley & Zaino, 2007).

4.2.4 Pragmatism

The coining of the term pragmatism is credited to Thomas Kuhn. The term was used in science to examine and find solutions to a research paradigm. Research paradigms reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in. From his writing regarding the structure of the scientific revolutions, Kuhn explained how progress is made in natural sciences and how to understand the forces that determine the nature and progress. Kuhn is also heavily criticised as he used the term paradigm in 21 senses. Although the senses are contradictory they elucidate each other (Kamoche, 2000). Pragmatists do not seek the truth which is independent from human experience but aim to achieve better and richer experience as a result of these approaches. The pragmatic approach must be centred in empirical and embodied experience (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). When pragmatists are faced with a problem they ask a question to determine why it would be different to act in one way compared to another (Morgan, 2014).

Inquiry is a key term used in pragmatism and is defined as an attempt to create new knowledge by taking action and experimenting with results (Morgan, 2014). Inquiry begins when an individual confronts a situation outside their scope of knowledge and takes action to extend knowledge and know how to proceed when faced with similar encounters.

Joubish et al. (2011) viewed a paradigm as a worldview, a whole framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place. A paradigm is defined as a coherent and mutually supporting pattern of concepts, values, methods and actions amenable to wide application. Johnson and Christensen (2008) regarded it as a point of view on research common

amongst a community of researchers, based on similar assumptions, concepts, values, and practices.

Pragmatism – what is ultimately important is what works in practice and what promotes social justice. Pragmatism is focused on the ends that we desire (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Pragmatists generalise that a research design requires planning and must be conducted based on what is best to resolve the research questions (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) which results in pragmatic knowledge. Johnson and Christensen (2008) coined their version of pragmatism as “dialectical pragmatism” as they argued that a mixed methodology should be attentive to accept ways of thinking, suppositions, and solve problems/perspectives from both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The term dialectical is used with specific attention paid to multiple perspectives and mixed research is claimed to be the “new kid on the block,” with the list of researchers identifying with this approach increasing rapidly. Feilzer (2010) emphasised that pragmatism is a philosophy mostly associated with mixed methods studies. Research conducted in the last 10 years has been characterised by a distinct turn toward more interpretive, postmodern and critical practices (Joubish *et al.*, 2011).

Pragmatism has a broad meaning of beliefs and actions, with the shared elements of pragmatism according to Morgan (2014) including the following:

- Actions cannot be separated from the situations and contexts in which they occur.
- Actions are linked to consequences in ways that are open to change.
- Actions depend on worldwide views that are socially shared beliefs.

4.2.5 Axiology

Axiology is the philosophical study of value (Johnson, & Christensen, 2013; Morgan, 2014). It seeks to determine that which is good in action and or objective. Axiology studies two types of values, ethics and aesthetics (Johnson, & Christensen, 2013). When axiology is applied to human action it is called ethics (focus on what is good and right) and aesthetics (beauty and harmony).

4.2.6 Quantitative

In the quantitative/ positivistic approach, emphasis is on the quantification of research constructs (Babbie *et al.*, 2015). From a positivistic perspective, numbers are assigned to the perceived qualities of an item (Weber 2004). The aim of the approach is that constructs are linked to

observable measurements through the operations of definitions. *Causal relationships are about the systematic conjunction of two factors, one of which, all things being equal, is argued to follow logically from the other* (Lin, 1998; 164). In liner with research objective, this method was deemed inappropriate to meet the set objective as numbers omit experiences of the participants. Justification of the method adopted follows below.

4.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH ADOPTED

In a study there is always an underlying philosophy; the identified framework for this study was the phenomenological research, field research, naturalistic inquiry or qualitative research as it is more popularly known, which is viewed as the opposite of positivistic research.

From the research objective, the researcher sought to give a rich description of the experiences of HR professionals to track their experiences in HR. Competencies for HR professionals are often defined by the view of senior managers and other employees or by an empirically tested conceptual framework (Ulrich *et al.*, 1995; Novak *et al.*, 2015). HR professionals' knowledge and abilities determine the extent to which they can exploit HR knowledge to create business success. The qualitative phase requires one to be systematic and rigorous which in turn reduces bias and error. The challenge in research methodology is adopting a method which suits the phenomenon under investigation (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). Urguhart (2013) advised that the methodology is easier only when the philosophy positions are decisively dealt with.

The research design was predisposed by the nature of the variables under study. Research design forms the bases of any research as it is the yardstick to which the hypothesis is to be explored and proven reliable and valid. The research design determines the success or failure of a research project (Urguhart, 2013). The research design is highly influenced by how a scholar perceives reality and discipline specific knowledge construction. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) affirmed a research design as a strategic framework connecting research questions to execution in a manner by which internal and external reliability can be enhanced. Mouton (2001) viewed a research design as a plan or blueprint of how a study will be carried out. Kumar (2005) defined it as a strategy of examining what has been conceived in order to acquire solutions to research questions or problems. Borg and Gall (1989) added the term systematic, which shows the extent of rigorous planning and organising of components of which the study is comprised.

The qualitative research design is inductive in nature, allowing a researcher to generate theory from observation. It is a subjective element which focuses on how research experience can be

interpreted from the social world. The contextual element in qualitative orientation looks at the specific setting and circumstances around detailed data collection (Morgan, 2014). On the other end, the quantitative approach is deductive in nature and thus emphasises a researcher's ability to test theories. Objectivity limits the researcher's influence in findings. Various settings and circumstances are applicable to data collection.

The researcher of this study adopted a method which enabled him to:

- gain more insight
- explore competencies which HR practitioners regard as essential
- assess the extent to which the competencies have contributed to individuals being employable
- explore how the identified competencies contribute to career success and career success
- identify the competency gap between the route from HR graduate to HR practitioner.

Qualitative methods such as open-ended interviewing and observation offer inductive, subjective, contextual research. Quantitative methods on the other hand use surveys which are regarded as deductive, objective and generalisable. Although mixed methods are still developing, both methods provide sound and well-developed matches and corresponding research processes and procedures (Morgan 2014).



4.4 INTERPRETIVISM

The interpretative paradigm explores an individual's world within the whole world of the life context rather than existing in a vacuum. A researcher in qualitative studies plays a crucial role for the success of the study as their role is not limited to the interview. The preceding step of analysis and identification of themes is done by the same interviewer (Preto, 2011). The qualitative phenomenon gives participants an opportunity to share feelings, perceptions, experiences and how events occurred in their lives (Constantino, Crane, Noll, Doswell & Braxter, 2007).

The aim with this method is to understand human experience as it is essential as compared to predicting, control and explaining. This method provides reflexivity as participants have space and time to reflect on their stories (Constantino *et al.*, 2007; James, 2007). Bradley (1993) justified the qualitative experience as an attempt to understand the experiences of others.

James (2007) advocated for email interviewing as a qualitative method. In her arguments, the use of emails enables the researcher to create narratives from respondents' opinions.

Constantino et al. (2007) stressed the growth in the use of email interviews and stated that the focus is in health-related fields. The researcher of this study approached senior HR personnel in order to collect rich data. In such an inquiry, a researcher is encouraged to be open minded as they are expected to view reality from the eye of the participants. The interpretative form of inquiry is developmental and dynamic and not static, emphasis is on both the process the outcome. The researcher was mindful of the fact that the use of emails will never replace face-to-face interviews but due to circumstances beyond control, emails were deemed as one of the feasible methods of data collection considering the study limitations. The use of emails as a method of collecting data is not new as other scholars (Britten, 1995; Green, & Britten, 1998; James, 2007; Lewis, 2015) have opted for the orientation. However, most studies which have relied on emails were from the medicine discipline.

This study sought to acquire rich descriptions provided by the methodological approach adopted. The thematic approach was deemed essential in the identification of competencies essential to HR employability and career success. The use of themes has been growing in psychology and sociology (Elliot, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Lieblich *et al.*, 1998). Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) revealed that the theme of discourse connects events in a meaningful chronological manner from the insights of individuals' experiences. Riessman, (2008) added that the chronological compositions from themes become stories or the individual life story. When using narrative, one deconstructs and then reconstructs the personal career story (Savickas, 2012; Taylor, Savackas, 2016). The researcher chose to use thematic content analysis as it reflected on individuals' accounts of their life events (White & Epston, 1990).

The justification of the interpretative orientation is found in Van Rensburg et al. (2011) who used the experiences of retiring senior board members of the SABPP. The objective for their study was to capture the length of their tenure so as to fill the gaps in literature of HR professional bodies in South Africa. By selecting the qualitative orientation, the researchers were able to document the HR journey and demystify the existence as a new entity, and rather portray an entity which existed and their study signifies that the current strides being made are a continuation of the mandate by the previous leaders.

For this study, data was collected and analysed from participants as they identified the competencies they have, to the competencies for employability and career success. Participants also gave an overview of their perceptions of the SABPP competency model. Important themes and patterns were derived through content analysis of the data.

4.4.1 Studies which have used the interpretivist approach

Mason (2010), in a literature synthesis of an appropriate sample size, recommended 31 as an appropriate size for studies which are purely qualitative. However, as observed from literature, this number is appropriate depending on numerous factors to mention the construct under investigation and the nature of the respondents; in other words, the answers are influenced by a researcher's methodological and epistemological perspective. Anthony et al.'s (2013) study had 20 respondents as they only required childhood cancer patients and survivors. Chinyamurindi's (2013) study had 35 participants who had gone through open distance learning. Chen (2012) conducted a PhD study which had 11 participants all of which were PhD candidates.

Constantino, Crane, Noll, Doswell and Braxter (2007), in their study, used 12 participants (mothers and their children). Their qualitative data was collected through emailed questions to respondents. From the data they were able to construct themes from the interaction between nurses and survivors. In their results they affirmed the feasibility of an emailed survey as a method of collecting qualitative data.

The study by McKenzie, Bennert, Kessler and Montgomery (2016) had 10 participants who had type 2 diabetes and they conducted in-depth interviews with the participants. Hampson, Hicks and Watt (2016) also used purposive sampling and had 14 focus groups with 31 semi-structured personal interviews. Savickas (2012) and Taylor and Savackas (2016) used the narrative orientation career interventions. Singh, Corner and Pavlovich (2015) used narrative analysis for 12 entrepreneurs to investigate their experiences in failed ventures.

4.5 CHALLENGES TO INTERPRETIVISM

The general fallacy of qualitative-related inquiry was highlighted by Morse, Niehaus, Varnhagen, Austin and McIntosh (2008) who proffered that the researcher will never be able to predict the number of participants, the length of interviews and the number of contact times with participants. Objectivity may also be lacking as the researcher faces a risk of identification, because when comprehension from both parties is lacking the results can lead to an impoverished narration (Pretto, 2011). The qualitative paradigm has numerous approaches, making it diverse and a challenge for academia (Drisko, 2008). The availability of the numerous epistemologies, purpose of research, methods, and style of reporting findings make it difficult to make simple generalisations about qualitative studies. However, Preto, (2011) argued that the availability of numerous methods of data analysis is an advantage, as the

researcher can choose a method which best suits the data collected. In the qualitative orientation, there are numerous methods available for the researcher to analyse data.

However, a qualitative orientation can explore unusual or contradictory experiences. Qualitative data captures diverse, complex meanings from subjective experiences (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). It explains the increasing popularity of interpretative methods but recognises growing concern about the lack of rigour by some researchers in using these methods. Qualitative studies are highly dependent on people and humans are known to be unpredictable and are not always logical in the way they act. Most researchers in this paradigm rely greatly on people to guide, control and direct the research.

4.6 MEASURES OF ENSURING DATA INTEGRITY

For research to produce results which are replicable and objective, it must be grounded on principles of scientific research which include systematic and empirically-based procedures (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). In order for any study to be regarded as credible and empirically sound, it must be reliable and valid (Flick, 2013; Silverman, 2011). One must always check the scores for validity for quantitative research and adopt strategies for the qualitative. Positivists use validity and reliability as evaluative criteria to attain objectivity in studies with a quantitative orientation (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon, 2006).

Credibility in qualitative research is attained through prolonged and sustained engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, members' check, progressive subjectivity and triangulation (Mertins 2005). Rigour from both methods will ensure that credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable findings are construed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) in Flick (2013; 209: Mertins, 2005) identified the appropriate criteria in qualitative studies as dependability, transferability, confirmability, credibility and trustworthiness. There is concern as most researchers fail to make use of the richness of the qualitative findings.

In qualitative studies, there are two methods proposed in Moisander and Valtonen (2006) by Silverman (2011):

- The research process must be transparent from the research strategy to the data analysis concisely dealt with in the study.
- Abiding to theoretical transparency. This is ensured by taking a standpoint on the theoretical orientation, from the interpretation and clearly showing why a theoretical study is adopted.

Silverman (2011) argued that low-inference descriptors ensure high levels of reliability. This is through the recording of concrete observation, rather than allowing researchers’ personal perspectives to influence reporting in a study. Silverman (2011) added that reliability in qualitative research can be attained through observation, from text, interviews and from audio and video data.

Type 1 error is common in quantitative studies by for instance finding ‘dubious’ correlations. The halo effect, values of the scholar and the truth according to respondents’ accounts are validation techniques. Triangulation, the comparison of qualitative and quantitative data and respondent validation are methods used to validate logic in qualitative research (Silverman, 2011; Flick 2013).

4.7 STUDY CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

This study was exploratory in nature as the researcher sought to understand the motivations and opinions of target respondents. The researcher aimed to determine the perceptions which drive HR practitioners registered with the SABPP and which influence employability and career success. The researcher sought to gather as much information as possible. Interviews are either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Phothongsunan 2010). Figure 4.1 below shows the framework adopted in the study.

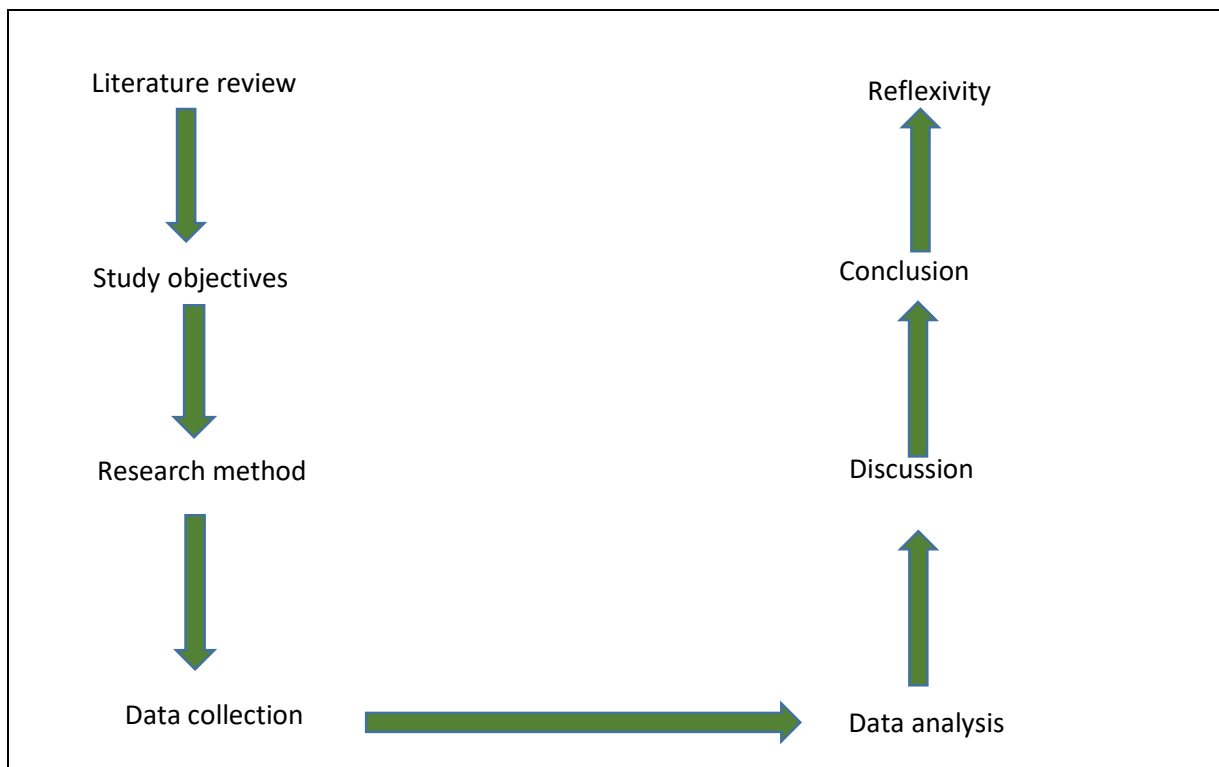


Figure 4.1 Methodology framework

4.8 OPERATIONALISATION

The researcher conducted a comprehensive literature review to identify the competencies which are instrumental to the new HR. The researcher was aware of the dangers of ignoring traditional HR competencies which was a sticking point identified in the development of HR. Another point of departure identified in literature was the dangers of adopting a one size fits all approach for HR competencies. As highlighted, although the dynamics that HR is facing are global, developing countries and developed nations differ due to their socio economic and political climate. In qualitative paradigms, the 'how' question speaks to the phenomenon under investigation and the 'why' question speaks to the wider context (Silverman, 2011). The qualitative paradigm is known for its proficiency in answering the 'why', 'what' or 'how' questions and this is attainable through methods such as participant observation or in-depth interviewing

Joubish et al. (2011) noted that a qualitative research orientation seeks out the 'why', not the 'how' of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information. This research approach makes certain deductions concerning people's motivations, aspirations, behaviours, value systems, concerns, attitudes, culture or lifestyles. The qualitative paradigms are regarded as anti-positivistic. This orientation takes meaning, experience and perception of respondents into account (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Delpont, 2002). Joubish et al. (2011) proposed critical theories, constructivism, positivism, post-positivism, and participatory/cooperative paradigms as the main paradigms in contemporary qualitative research.

The qualitative orientation is associated with constructive and interpretative paradigms (Yardely & Bishop, 2008). Qualitative methods are well suited in gaining in-depth understanding of moral reasoning and experience. Arguably, qualitative studies can achieve the same through assessing changes in views and activities. Good qualitative research takes for granted concepts examine inconsistencies, suppressed meanings. The qualitative approach in this study sought to explore the constructs under investigation from an HR perspective. This was informed by themes that emerged from respondents' opinions. Descriptive approaches seek to find facts by assessing opinions, behaviours and characteristics of a specified group.

Qualitative research orientation provides an accurate description of variables. Contemporary qualitative research has been conducted from a large number of various paradigms that influence conceptual and meta-theoretical concerns of legitimacy, control, data analysis, ontology and epistemology, among others (Joubish *et al.*, 2011).

Qualitative data provides a detailed understanding of a problem (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative understanding arises out of studying a few individuals and exploring their perspectives in great depth. Most qualitative studies seek to describe or generate new hypotheses and theory, especially when there is little known of the phenomenon under investigation and thus the aim is to know more about a subject matter. Qualitative studies tend to be exploratory in nature. Qualitative researchers are of the view that quantitative techniques are not the solution to validating qualitative data (Silverman, 2011). Most quantitative practices are deemed inappropriate for a qualitative paradigm. The qualitative paradigm thrives from its ability to study phenomena which are not available elsewhere.

4.8.1 Population

In order to acquire competencies for HR professionals, Ulrich et al. (1995) justified that the use of senior managers and other internal customers and an empirically tested conceptual framework are generally acceptable methods. Experiences of the HR professionals are sufficient as they provide knowledge and abilities which are required within the HR profession to build business success. From this standpoint, the researcher made use of senior HR professionals as the appropriate population in spite of some shortcomings which are discussed in the limitations of the study. Researchers should always seek to find knowledgeable and appropriate respondents so as to gather reliable and valid data (Zohrabi, 2013).

Gorman, Meriac, Roch, Ray, and Gamble, (2017) also conducted a study which required top HR leaders, titles of the executives surveyed included VP of HR, VP of Global Talent Development, Director of HR, and HR Manager. This group was identified as they were the only group which were aware of the researchers' interest and terminology. They also used snowball sampling and they concede that it is not possible to determine the response rate from the various sources. Hutchison and Huo, (2017, In New Zealand concede that getting such participants is mostly feasible under the guidance of the respective professional body. This is similar to Gorman et al, (2017); Simón, & Ferreiro, (2018), who used data from the practitioners registered with the SHRM.

The population of the study comprised members of the SABPP registered as master and chartered HR practitioners. The SAPBB sent out a communiqué to the registered HR professionals inviting them to participate in the study. However, there was a low response rate from the targeted practitioners. As the call was made only twenty (20) participants heeded the callout met the criteria set for the study. Most HR professionals with fairly reasonable years

(more than 5 years as senior HR generalist) of experience were willing to participate even though they did not meet the requirements set for individuals to participate in the study. However some of the participants were employed as cooperate HR manager with over 11 years of experience but were not registered as either master or chartered practitioners with the professional body. Also Kate was willing to participate who had been a senior HR generalist for between 0-5yrs experience.

These members are at the top echelon of the SABPP hierarchy and as such have unique insights; such members also are champions of HR in South Africa. These specialists provided valuable input into the subject matter. Their knowledge and experiences precede that of HR practitioners. The experts were from different provinces in South Africa. Giannantonio and Hurley (2002) conceded that expert opinion is the first step in identifying skills gaps. Van Eynde and Tucker (1997) used expert opinions from 24 senior executives in their research.

The total population of HR practitioners in South Africa is unknown. There is a known population of practitioners who are registered with the SABPP or who are members of other professional associations in the field, but according to estimates in the profession, these people represent a minority of HR practitioners in South Africa (Abbott *et al.*, 2013). The criteria used to determine experts to ensure the authority, representativeness, and reliability were a relevant bachelor's degree coupled with at least 15 years of work experience with a senior title (Ye, & Jiang 2014). A review of the literature, opinions of HR practitioners and executives comprised the process through which specific traits, skills, and knowledge elements were identified. The collection of specific traits, skills, and knowledge is associated with professional competencies.

A total of 55 people heeded the call to be participants in the study. All of these occupied senior positions within their respective organisations; however, of these only 35 met the criteria for the study. Those who were left out were not members of the professional body or had not upgraded their status to the descriptors highlighted by the professional body. To be an eligible participant, the criteria required an individual to be registered with the SABPP as master or chartered practitioner. The professional body was the indicator as it is recognised by SAQA as responsible for the certification of HR in South Africa; the SABPP already had an existing competency model which was used as a benchmark to inform the study. Globally and regionally, the professional body is setting the trend for HR professionalisation.

4.8.2 Sampling

In quantitative designs, sampling procedures ensure the findings are generalisable (Silverman 2011). The sampling procedures must be representable, ensure confidence and thus allow the researcher to make more inferences. In qualitative paradigms, sampling procedures are unavailable.

This is so as samples from the qualitative phase are regarded as generally small. Purposive sampling was selected as it enabled the researcher to select features he was interested in. Purposive sampling allows researchers to critically ponder on parameters they have an interest in (Silverman 2011). Abbott et al. (2013) used purposive sampling in order to acquire themes from their participants. From this standpoint, the researcher, similar to Abbott et al (2013), did not structure the sample along demographic variables. They sampled 19 executive-level, 23 professional-individual level and eight junior-level HR practitioners. Participants worked in small, medium and large organisations. McKenzie et al. (2016) justified purposive homogeneous sampling as it enabled them to select respondents with specific traits in their case type 2 diabetes – their study had 10 participants.

4.9 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEW

Qualitative orientation seeks to collect accounts of the life-world of the interviewee (Kvale 1983). A qualitative research interview seeks to acquire data on (1) factual information and knowledge on what the participant knows; their values, preferences, and interests; their attitudes and beliefs; and their experiences in life (Bless & Higson, 1995). In the qualitative paradigm, reality is viewed as subjective and in multiple ways as seen by participants in the study (TerreBlanche & Durrheim 1999).

The researcher sought to acquire as much nuance from the experiences of the professionals. In order to achieve objectivity and abide by the code of ethics, the researcher sought consent from the participants and they were willing to co-operate and to share their experience. Confidentiality was maintained as the names of the participants were omitted from the study. Where clarification was required, the researcher sought it either by telephone call or email or at the convenience of the respondents.

Methods of collecting, analysing and interpreting qualitative data include the use of open-ended questions, interviews, journals, diaries and classroom observation, to mention a few (Zohrabi, 2013). For this study, the emailed questionnaire comprised a mixture of closed-ended questions for demographic variables and open-ended questions for respondents' experience in their HR

career progression. As alluded to in Zohrabi (2013), the use of open-ended questions leads to a greater level of discovery. The responses from questions are considered an accurate account of reflecting what respondents want to say. A researcher in qualitative studies plays a crucial role for the success of the study as their role is not limited to the interview. The preceding step of analysis and identification of themes is done by the same interviewer (Pretto, 2011). The qualitative approach gives participants an opportunity to share feelings, perceptions, experiences and how events occurred in their lives (Constantino, Crane, Noll, Doswell & Braxter, 2007). This method provides reflexivity as participants have space and time and to reflect on their stories. (Constantino *et al.*, 2007; James, (2007). Bradley (1993) justified the qualitative experience as an attempt to understand the experiences of others.

The researcher was mindful of the fact that the use of emails would never replace face-to-face interviews but due to circumstances beyond his control, emails were the most feasible means of collecting the data. Some scholars are criticised for applying irrelevant criteria in qualitative studies to validate aspects such as objectivity, reliability or random sampling. A qualitative orientation makes use of purposive sampling (Yardley & Bishop, 2008). In the qualitative approach, it is difficult or impossible to mathematically quantify the data collected. The researcher used the qualitative approach to understand professionals' experience and to express their perspectives. The use of semi-structured questions allowed respondents to expand their opinions.

4.9.1 Questions guide

In the development of sound interview questions, creativity and researcher insight is necessary, rather than adopting a 'mechanical conversation' of research questions (Maxwell, 2005). The design of the questionnaire was informed by an analysis of the literature. The literature was linked to the set objectives of the study (for further details consult the interview guide in Annexure 1.) The research questions were designed in a manner in which respondents had to deconstruct their experience and systematically examine meaning inferred. The use of semi-structured questions for the interviews was put in place to ensure gathered data was not too rigid or too open (Zohrabi, 2013). With guidance from the research questions, the researcher prepared a structured interview guide. Questions were designed with the aim of identifying HR competencies essential to employability and those that are attached to career success.

4.9.1.1 Question conceptualisation

This section discusses what informed the researcher as he developed the research instrument. This section also discusses demographic variables, employability questions, career success and HR competencies. The questions were conceptualised with the intention of enquiry centred on the interviewees' perspective. Each section of the qualitative interviews comprised research questions informed from study objectives. Detailed data was gathered through open-ended questions that provided direct quotations.

4.9.1.2 Participant demographics

Race, gender, age, income range, job title, years of experience and academic qualifications were the demographic variables considered. These variables identified were also informed by literature as variables which have an effect on the study variables.

4.9.1.3 Research questions

Zohrabi (2013) stated that the use of questions which require a Yes or No response hardly provides any useful and relevant information. To cater for this shortcoming, follow-up questions were posed for respondents to give reasons for their opinions. Research questions and interview questions must have a logical connection. The researcher needs to anticipate the practicality of some research questions trying to predict how people will respond and understand the questions. A pilot test is always recommended to ensure revisions are made (Maxwell, 2005).

4.10 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Creswell (2014) advised that the data collection methods must be rigorously conducted. Maxwell (2005) affirmed that data collection strategies must go through revision and must be carefully crafted to suit a study as this helps in addressing validity threats to the responses.

In literature, interviews are regarded as the most appropriate (efficient and valid) way of collecting qualitative data. Observation provides a direct and powerful way of learning respondents' behaviour. Interviews provide information on what was missed by observation and check the accuracy of observation.

Abbott, Goosen and Coetzee (2013), in their mixed study, made use of face-to-face interviews and telephonic interviews. In this study, the interview interval lasted between 40 to 90 minutes and was conducted at the convenience of the respondents. Data quality was ensured by the use

of follow-up questions based on the researcher's in-depth knowledge of the field. Data collected from HR practitioners was recorded and transcribed by the researcher and stored electronically for back up to ensure no loss of data. Thematic content analysis was the method adopted in the analysis of data; data was grouped into broad themes before analysis.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. During the interview, the researcher also scribed in order to cement the recording, which was done with the consent of the participants. It was necessary for some senior HR practitioners who had busy schedules to 'squeeze' the researcher into their schedules as they met the criteria set for the study and it was imperative for the researcher to interview them. Some interviews were rescheduled over a month as more pressing issues came up which needed practitioners' undivided attention. Practitioners who did not meet the set criteria of the study were also interviewed. These were senior HR practitioners who had availed themselves to participate in the study but at the end of the interview indicated they were either not members of the professional body and or were yet to upgrade their professional registration to match their current portfolios.

Upon showing interest to be part of the study, the participants were given informed consent forms to sign and the researcher swore to abide by the code of ethics. Before the data was collected, the researcher applied for ethical clearance and only after the ethical clearance had been granted did the researcher make contact with prospective participants. Most participants were unwilling to be identified. The transcribed data was numbered RQ1 to 55, with a pseudonym given thereafter.

In the case of the telephonic interviews, they were conducted at the agreed upon times, the calls were recorded and they lasted between 35 minutes to an hour. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed of the goal of the study and an email had also been sent by the professional body (SABPP) for willing participants to avail themselves. Not many participants who met the criteria came forward.

4.11 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACHES

The analysis process begins with reading all the data at once and dividing it into smaller and meaningful units. The basis for judging quality in the qualitative orientation rests on corroboration as the findings are a reflection of people's perceptions

Hampson, Hicks and Watt (2016), in their data analysis, studied transcripts so as to identify the main ideas and concepts related to the research question. The research design informs how the

researcher must analyse data. The argument adopted by the researcher is qualitative data analysis can be used to develop a research instrument with sound psychometric properties. Codes, themes, and quotes can be yielded from qualitative data. Content analysis shares similar merits to those of qualitative research such reliability, validity, objectivity and generalisability (Irene, 2014).

- Quotes can be used to write items for a questionnaire.
- Codes can develop variables which group items.
- Themes can be adapted to group codes into scales.

These steps are crucial in the transit from qualitative data to instrument development.

The qualitative phase can also be used in the development of new variables, to identify existing scales in current instruments and can be used in the categorisation of information to be tested quantitatively.

The qualitative methods were best suited for the exploratory nature of this study, and allowing the data to speak for itself further supported a qualitative method of inquiry (Andresen, 2017). Reading or listening to tapes, the qualitative text is regarded as the first step. The researcher then transcribes interviews. This then helps in developing tentative ideas on categories and relationships. There are 3 techniques of analysis at the disposal of a researcher, namely connective strategies derived from narratives; memos and categorisation strategy (thematic content analysis); and coding (Maxwell, 2005). Thematic analysis is described as a ‘foundational method’, constituting a ‘core skill’ for qualitative researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clark (2006) advocated for thematic analysis as it offers great flexibility and it has been widely applied; therefore it can be used in both inductive and deductive methodologies (Frith and Gleeson 2004; Hayes 1997). The method identifies, reports, and analyses data for the meanings produced in and by people, situations, and events (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis was opted for in this study as it offered a stronger sensitivity than a quantitative methodology could offer. In *thematic analysis, the emphasis is on the content of a text, “what” is said more than “how”* (Riessman, 2005; 2).

Coding in qualitative studies is deemed a strategic categorisation method. Coding involves the segmenting of text to ascertain key labels; practically it emphasises reading and re-reading text to make sense of patterns and themes which emerge from data. Some researchers use colour to code each segment (Babbie, *et al.*, 2015). Coding in thematic analysis serves the purpose of

making connections between different parts of the data. With thematic analysis, coding is derived from the responses of the participants (Alhojailan, 2012).

Data is fractured and categorised into categories which facilitate comparison on items in the same category, thus helping the development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2005). On the other hand, thematic content analysis places information in bins for further analysis. Content analysis is objective, systematic, and in some circles of literature is known to be a quantitative procedure. Thematic content analysis is essential in tabulating results of open-ended responses and interviews (Creswell, 2014). Thematic analysis allows us to see patterns in our dataset consistency (Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke & Townsend, 2010)

Information gathered from each phase must be analysed separately. Findings from the exploratory phase build into quantitative measures. Creswel (2014) advised paying particular attention to methods of qualitative analysis steps and especially which findings to build on. Data was transcribed from the perspective of participants; reference was always made to the interview notes, as suggested by McKenzie et al. (2016).

The analysis of qualitative research can follow subject steps depending on the researcher. This is so as Saunders et al. (2007); Miles and Huberman (1994) in Mertens (2005; 423); and Palmquist (1993) in Babbie et al. (2015; 490) all suggested different steps for analysis. Babbie et al. (2015; 490) confirmed that in the qualitative orientation there is no neat and tidy way for data analysis. Content analysis consists of conceptual (thematic analysis) and relational analysis. Thematic analysis requires systematic coding procedures to produce reliability (Floersch, *et al.*, 2010; Baraun & Clarke, 2006). Consistency requires systematic coding procedures to produce reliability (Floersch *et al.*, 2010; Braun & Clark, 2006).

Thematic analysis approaches are appropriate when samples are determined and defined before proceeding with the study (Alhojailan, 2012). When I began thematic analysis, I read through the transcribed data line by line noting all the themes which emerged from the respondents. Themes are used to describe the object of inquiry (Floersch,*et al.*, 2010). Alhojailan (2012) explicitly stated that in conducting the thematic analysis process, there must not be any engagement with pre-existing themes. Thus making the process adaptable to any research which relies only on participants' clarifications.

Hosmer (2008) justified this process as it “builds reliability in themes analysis coding”. At this stage, the researcher was better informed of any conflicting results (if there are any) with

respect to any themes that were added or removed by the outside and independent reviewers. The reviewers were experts in qualitative research whom the researchers consulted to ensure he was on the right path. These experts were scholars who had experience and had a track record with working on qualitative data. Consent to use their names for the study was not sought and this was done to add confidence with the work done on data analysis. However, the identification of themes did not seek to confirm literature, but sought to highlight how experiences are a key in identifying the competencies for employability or career success. Most of the competencies which were identified in the study do exist. Some that can be mentioned are training and development, recruitment and selection. Validating themes in the early and late stages of data analysis is essential (Alhojailan, 2012.) In the identification of such key traditional competencies I saw how challenging it is to put a story to it as participants listed the competencies. However, practitioners were able to operationalise the competency and explained how they make use of it or how they use it in their daily duties.

For instance, a competency on knowledge of the legal framework which governs the employment relationship which I termed legal acumen, Penny used the narrative to exemplify the trait.



‘you know we had new interns who had passed their qualifications and surpassed the minimum requirements of our internship and had passed with flying colours. We requested them to make a presentation for us on the employment equity act. Looking at their grades, the assumption was it was going to be a walk in the park; it was quite disheartening to see them struggle to even articulate what the act does and its purpose in South Africa. It was quite distressing because they were all from different higher education institutions all South Africans of different races who failed to put the act to context’

In data analysis of Penny’s story, the central theme identified was labour legislation rather than the Act. From her story, it is observable that race, gender and the institution individuals come from do not have an impact on their performance and further, it is evident that the lack of coping in the work environment is a big problem in the South African context. There is need to ensure what is taught can be converted to what will be done or can be done.

The researcher kept electronic copies backed up on the cloud to avoid data loss of transcriptions. This enabled him to keep segments of data which represented the main theme. The narratives proved to be interesting as they provided stories to justify the theme which emerged. In a way, the narratives acted as a means of justifying practitioners’ opinion. This

step enabled the researcher to develop his interpretation of the data in detail by using the experiences of practitioners on the themes under HR employability and career success.

Informed by literature, before data analysis began, the researcher developed a general idea and identified the major themes for HR employability and career success. The themes which were identified, such as legal framework, were consistent and the researcher felt reassured. The researcher also consulted colleagues and seasoned statisticians on the data gathered and discussed the emerging themes with them which helped him to develop ideas of his own analysis. This was done to ensure dependability and trustworthiness of data and so that findings would be consistent and repeatable. This process helped to confirm the accuracy of findings and to ensure the findings were supported by the data collected.

The use of narratives also made it easy to categorise the aim of the study (HR competencies, employability and career success). Narratives enabled the participants to discuss their competencies independently and also ensured that their responses were completely dependent on the existing SABPP competency model.

Practitioners were given room to identify the areas of weakness of the competency model and assess the impact of the SABPP competency model. If I had opted for a positivistic orientation, I would not have been able to gain as much insight from the experiences and expectations of practitioners. The interviews transcribed were gathered and exported to QDA Miner Lite.

In qualitative studies, data analysis occurs throughout the data collection process (Mertens 2005). The analysis process must however not be rigid; it should be systematic and comprehensive (Tesch 1990). Babbie et al. (2015) advised that choosing too much data in the qualitative orientation ruins the study.

The following steps were taken to ensure quality and minimise the shortcomings of the epistemological assumption:

- A pilot study was done to ensure questions asked were in line with the context and were applicable to HR. Interviews were conducted with HR professionals who occupy lower levels within the hierarchy (middle managers). All the participants of the pilot study were based in East London. They were readily available for the researcher and willing to participate. The pilot study also ensured that the researcher became familiarised with the research methodology.
- The pilot study allowed the researcher to practice the interviewing techniques

- From the pilot study, the researcher was able to experience the barriers associated with getting participants who met the characteristics set for the study and reflecting the need to importance understanding a method of enquiry before "falling in".
- The researcher was able to modify the interview questions
- The researcher was able to familiarise himself with the language of HR from the pilot study
- From the pilot study, clear and concise questions were asked.
- During data collection, all the interviews, telephonic and face to face, and emails were transcribed within a 24-hour period.
- From the pilot study, the researcher acquired the experience of transcribing, managing data and coding qualitative data. The researcher was also able to refine the skill of conducting interviews and interpreting data and how to relate to the participants during an interview, how to prepare for an interview either face to face or telephonic, selecting an environment with the least noise to ensure data quality.
- From the pilot study I was also able to gain knowledge on how to identify codes.
- The challenge was the small number of participants consulted (3). However from the small number, enough suggestions were made by the practitioners to cement the methodology adopted. The pilot study was conducted in the Eastern Cape Province due to the accessibility of the participants. One was a senior HR manager with the University of Fort hare who referred the researcher to her network for the pilot study.
- The interviews were conducted in an environment which had little to no noise, and were done at the convenience of the participants.
- After the pilot study the researcher was better prepared to acquire rich and detailed information in understanding HR practitioners' experiences in South Africa. Follow-up questions or emails were used as a means of seeking clarity in areas which were not clear and to stimulate the flow of detail and impression (Bryman 2012).
- Participants in the study were from The Eastern cape, Gauteng, Kwazulu Natal and Western Cape.
- In some cases (Penny, Noluthando and Craig), participants requested the transcribed data to ensure the data was accurately representing their sentiments. Most participants were more interested in the end product as they saw the bigger picture for the profession.
- Part of the findings were shared with the practitioners on 27 July 2016 when the SABPP hosted the first Research in Practice conference.

- I read through the data over and over again before analysing it.
- Coding was done as soon as possible so as to identify the emerging themes.
- Codes were reviewed relating to the data transcripts.

These steps, among others, enabled me to make sound judgement on the constructs under investigation. As an interviewer, I was a part of the process as I was involved when practitioners were deconstructing their stories.

4.12 Challenges of method adopted

As the participants in the study occupied senior positions getting them to allocate time for the interview was a challenge. Some interviews were moved numerous times as the call of duty within their organisations took precedence. Other practitioners opted for telephonic interviews. Snowball sampling was also used as some practitioners “felt pity” for the researcher as he had travelled to different towns and other interviews being cancelled. It was eye opening to note that more than one sampling technique is appropriate as experienced by the researcher, from convenience sampling to random sampling then snowball sampling. This is not unique to the study as Gorman et al, (2017); among others experienced it. From the call out done by the professional body, from a potential of over 250 participants only the willing heeded to the call thus limiting the amount of data collected and generalisability of study findings.



4.13 CONCLUSION

The merits of using an interpretative orientation is guided as the purpose of the topic under investigation. The researcher sought insights from senior HR personnel on their journey in the HR career which gave a richer and complete description of constructs under study using one approach. Criticism and the merits of the methodology adopted were discussed in this chapter. Debate and justification of the sample size was deliberated upon. The following chapter operationalises each phase adopted in this research.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter identified the research paradigm adopted in the study. As stated in that chapter, the qualitative method of inquiry was adopted as the most suitable to address the research question under investigation. Although little literature on HR competencies exists, the researcher sought to identify the HR competencies which HR practitioners prioritise in South Africa. The managerial implications of the competencies identified from the results of the qualitative phase are discussed in this chapter.

5.2 STUDY RATIONALE

The selected sample for the study were senior HR practitioners registered with the SABPP as master or chartered HR practitioners. Their experiences and perceptions were required to identify competencies for HR employability and career success. The forms of communication used by the researcher to gather data were face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews, and email. The researcher made use of open-ended questions and semi-structured questions; emailed messages are considered a qualitative method in most research circles.

The following objectives of the study had to be answered by the participants:

- Identify the competencies required for HR professionals to execute their duties effectively in South Africa (employability to career success)
- Critically assess the SABPP models' relevance to the work of South African HR professionals in terms of articulating the required competencies.

5.3 PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

To ensure anonymity of the participants, the researcher used a code to identify each participant. Data gathered was from face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews and email. The use of email was adopted as a method in the study as most participants were willing to participate this way as their schedules and diaries were very full and in this way they were able to give input at a time convenient to them. Justification of the email also can be seen from the response rate as over 100 questions were sent out after the call out. On the follow-ups most participants simply noted that they did not have time to sit and complete the questions. Some participants

opted for this method as the questions on competency identification took a lot of time and required more introspection of their career path.

The codes adopted for the study were RQ 1-55 and were given pseudonyms thereafter. There were 55 participants in the study. The demographic variables adopted for the study were race, gender, age, income, current job title, years of experience and academic qualification.

From the 55 participants, a total of 35 met the criteria set for the study (registered as a master or chartered HR practitioners). The breakdown of method of communication with them was as follows: 20 emailed questions, 25 interviews and 10 telephonic interviews. For the emailed questionnaire, in instances where the researcher needed clarity regarding the responses, an email with follow-up questions was sent out. It is also important to note that no participant made use of two of the methods and thus each participant, except in cases where clarity was required, participated once. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms were adopted. The characteristics of the selected sample were discussed in Chapter 4. Table 5.1 below lists all the demographic variables of the participants.

5.3.1 Demographic variables



It is essential to note, and it clear from Table 5.1, that all participants considered for the study were registered with the HR professional body either as master or chartered practitioners. The participants excluded from the study were not registered members of the body and they stated that they were not aware of the body and what it does or they simply did not see the benefits of being a member. The participants who met the criteria set for the study were: 16 males and 19 females. Regarding race there were 10 white people, 15 black people, three coloured people and seven Indians. Age categories of the participants were as follows: three participants were below the age of 30; nine were between 31 and 40; 11 were between 41 and 50; five were between 51 and 55 and six participants were above the age of 56. There were also participants in the study who occupied senior positions but were not members of the professional body and some were members but they were registered in positions below master HR practitioner. The positions of the participants were as follows: Chief HRD practitioner; HR and IR manager; HR manager; People development manager (group); HR manager; Group HR Director; HR manager; Director HR; Owner of consulting firm; Director organisation development; HR business advisor; Group manager remuneration and organisation development; Human resource management senior consultant; HR manager; Senior personnel practitioner; Head HR;

Head HR utilisation; Senior manager HRM; Deputy director HR; Senior manager employee relations (director); ER manager; Head research SABPP.

As illustrated in Table 5.1, all of the participants had matric. What is clear is that not all the participants who worked in HR had the basic HR qualification. For instance, to mention a few, Noluthando was an HR manager but had matric and professional certificates, Simon had a law degree.

Table 5.1 further shows the qualifications of the participants: matric, Bachelor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology, Bachelor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology (honours), Bachelor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology and Organisational Psychology, Bachelor of Commerce in Labour Relations, Master of Commerce, Doctor of Commerce, Bachelor of Social Science, Bachelor of Social Science in Human Resource Management, Bachelor of Social Science (honours), Bachelor of Social Science Social work, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts Political Science, National Diploma in Human Resources Management, Bachelors of Technology in Human Resources Management, National Diploma Business Management, Bachelor of Technology in Labour Relations, National Diploma Public Relations, LLB, Master in Business Administration, Master in Industrial Psychology (research and coursework), Master in Public Administration, postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education, HR certificate, PhD Human Resources Management, amongst other qualifications.



5.3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As is evident in Table 5.1, some participants did not meet the criteria set for the study. However, the participants were willing to participate in the interview process so that they could introspect about their knowledge areas of HR. The unit of analysis set for the study was being registered with the SABPP as a master or chartered practitioner. The excluded practitioners were either registered at a level below the set criteria or were not members of the professional body. However, the data from excluded participants can be utilised in future studies.

Table 5.1: Demographic variables

Pseudonym	Age range	Race	Gender	Work experience	Position	Academic qualification
Jane	<30	White	Female	6-10	Group HR Director	BCom, Honours Industrial Psychology, SABPP, ASDSA.
Susan	41-50	White	Female	16-20	HR manager	Matric, B Comm IOP, B Comm Honors IOP, Psychometrist, National Diploma HR, Business Management Diploma.
Faith	51-55	white	Female	21+	Director HR	Matric; B Soc Sci, D Comm, SABPP Master
Nicole	41-50	White	Female	16-20	Managing director	Matric, B A Law, BA Hons Psych & B A Honors HRM, Chartered HR Professional.
Penny	41-50	White	Female	21+	Director organisation development	Matric, B Soc SC Social Work, M A Social Work, Management And Change, Senior Executive Programme.
Sipho	31-40	Black	Male	11-15yers	Chief HRD practitioner	Matric, ND Hrm< B Tech HRM, Skills Development Facilitation, Current Lib.
Rob	31-40	White	Male	11-15	HR & IR manager	Matric, B Comm Labour Relations & Personnel Relations, B Comm Honours Industrial Sociology, Certificate In Project Management
Qebo	56+	Black	Male	21+	HR manager	Matric BA Education, BED Career Guidance And Counselling, Msc ED HR Org Development, D Ed Educational Psychology.
Zubeida	31-40	Indian	Female	11-15	People development manager (group)	Matric B A Human Resources Management, Hons Human Resources Development Management, Outcomes Based Assessor Strengths Strategy Facilitator/Coach.
Peter	41-50	White	Male	21+	HR manager	Matric, Ba Pol, B A Admin, B Soc Sc Hons Work Place Change And Labour Law.
Moses	56+	White	Male	21+	HR business advisor	Ba Human Movement (, BA (Hons) HRM/IR Chartered HR Practitioner
Simon	41-50	White	Male	11-15	Group manager remuneration and organisation development	N Diploma HRM, M DP Certificate, HR Professional SABPP
Noluthando	<30	Black	Female	6-10	Human resource management	B Tech Degree In Human Resources; Currently Studying Towards Master Of Business Leadership.
Siphokazi	41-50	Black	Female	11-15	HR manager	B Juris, HR Diploma, MBA
Sesethu	31-40	Black	Female	11-15	Senior perssone practitioner	Matric

							B Comm Industrial Psychology, N Dip Public Relations Management, Certificate In Business Management Certificate In Marketing Management, Certificate In Business Administration, Certificate In HIV AIDS Care counselling
Stephen	51-55	Colored	Male	16-20	Head HR		Matric, Diploma HR, B Tech HR
Mark	41-50	White	Male	21+	Head HR utilization		Matric Diploma Personnel Management
Ludwe	41-50	Black	Male	21+	Senior manager HRM		Matric, ND Public Management, Advanced Management Diploma
Babalwa	31-40	Black	Female	11-15	Deputy director HR		Matric, B Soc Sc HRM MPA Admin
Lindelwa	41-50	Black	Female	21+	Senior manager HRM		Matric, ND Public Management, Advanced Management Diploma
Zizopho	41-50	Black	Female	16-20	Senior manager HRM		Matric. B Juris, Advanced Diploma Personnel Management
Athenkosi	41-50	Black	Female	16-20	Deputy director HR		B Admin, M admin, Management Development
Unathi	51-55	Black	Female	21+	Deputy director HR		Matric, B Adm, Hons Industrial Psychology
Chan	31-40	Indian	Male		Deputy director HR		Matric B Comm HR, MBA
John	41-50	White	Male	21+	Deputy director HR		Matric, Nd Public Management
Kimberly	31-40	Black	Female	11-15	Deputy director HR		Matric, B Admin, Honors B Admin
Boly	31-40	Indian	Female	11-15	Senior manager HR		Matric, B Comm HRM, Hons Hrm
Thomas	41-50	Black	Male	21+	Deputy director HR		Matric, B Adim, Hons Industrial Psychology
Siphe	41-50	Black	Female	21+	Senior manager employee relations (director)		Matric, B A LLB, B Tech Labour Relations
Craig	<30	White	Male	6-10	Senior HR manager		Matric, B Soc Scie Psychology. B Comm Hns HRM, Masters IPS Course Work. Registered Psychologist
Mpho	41-50	Black	Male	11-15	ER manager		Matric, B Admin, B Admin Honors
Muhasin	56+	Indian	Male	21+	HR manager		Matric, B Soc Sc HRM, B Soc Sc HRM Hons
Gabriel	56+	White	Male	21+	Director HR		Ba, Post Grad Diploma Higher Education Diploma
Charisa	35-40	Indian	Female	11-15	HR manager		Matric, HR Certificate Developmental Programs, HR Management
Abbie	56+	White	Female	21+	HR executive		Phd

5.4 EMPLOYABILITY

This section outlines participants' experience in employability. The question on this topic first deals with the participants' experiences in their quest to attain employment after their academic career, and even during. It sought to explore participants' subjective rating on how they fared in the labour market post-graduation or after completing a degree. The following questions were to identify the measures which they took to become employable or marketable to the labour market and for an HR job.

Regarding the competencies required for employability, the practitioners related a journey starting from the competencies they possessed at the time of conducting the study. The researcher then requested the participants to identify the competencies they regard as essential to HR employability. On assessing the value of participants' academic qualifications, participants were requested to align their career progression to their academic prowess.

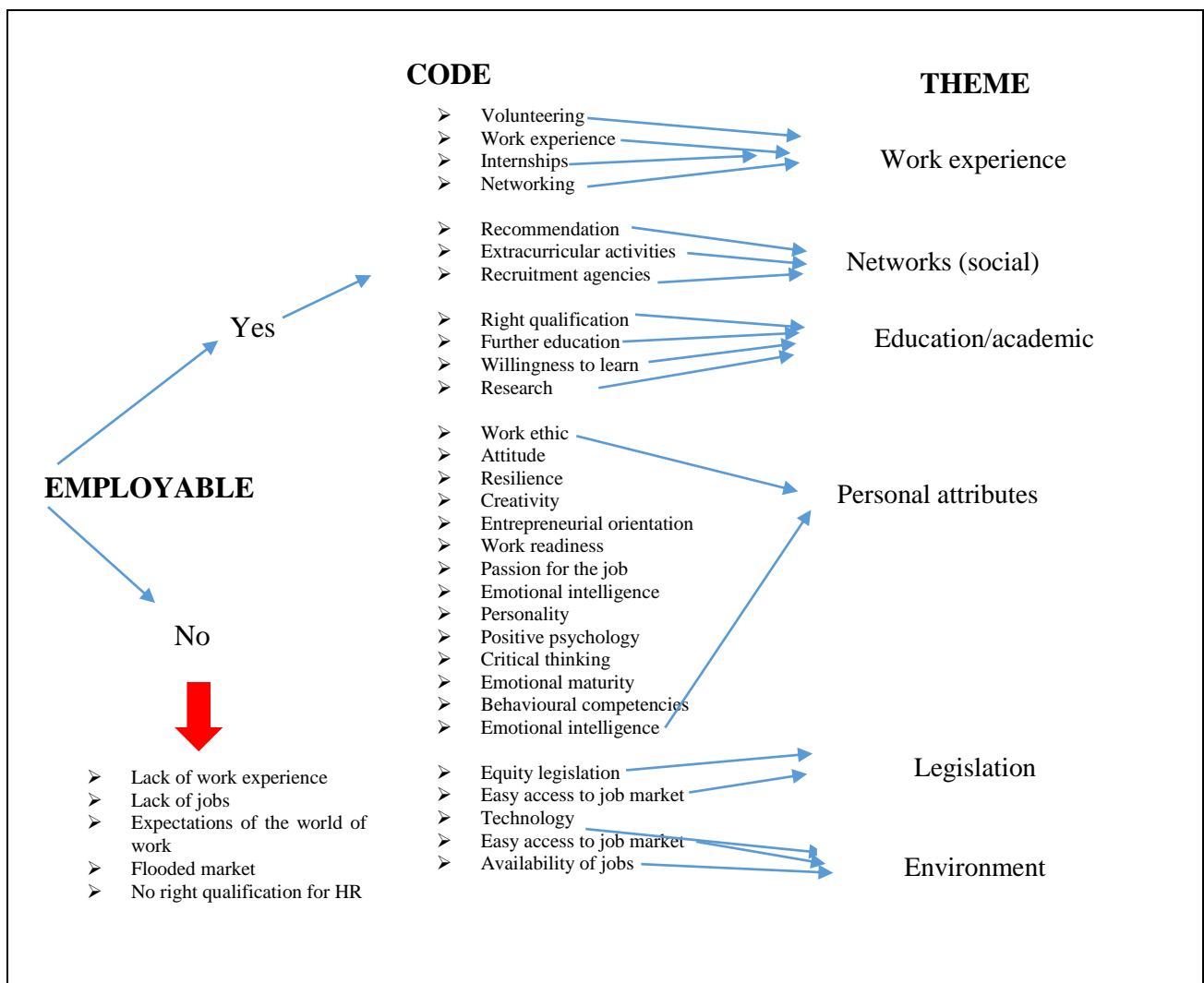


Figure 5.1: Generic employability themes and conditions for not being employable

5.4.1 State of employability after first qualification

The first question requested participants to indicate how they fared and rated their employability soon after leaving school and to give a reason for their answer. The researcher grouped the responses of into the *YES* (employable) responses and the *NO* (not employable) responses. Figure 5.1 above shows the generic employability skills as identified by participants.

5.4.1.1 I was not employable after my first qualification

After the completion of the first qualification, Jane, Faith, Noluthando, Sesethu, Babalwa and Craig did not think they were employable when they left university. The themes which emerged from their reasons stating why they were not employable after the completion of their first qualification included lack of work experience, incorrect expectations, environment with no jobs and the lack of right qualification.

As shown in the Table 5.2 below, not having adequate information on the occupation in which one wants to participate can result in one being unemployable. It is advisable to always keep abreast with the trends in an occupation so as to ensure being equipped with the needs of employers. Not having the right academic qualification for the career which you want to pursue also makes you unemployable. This is so as HR seeks to professionalise and thus the value of an HR degree is growing. Experience is another factor – employers often require new employees who are experienced as this reduces the induction and training costs. Some participants highlighted that it was risky to hire someone simply based on an academic qualification as some failed to adjust and experience has taught them that there is a difference between academic performance and executing tasks. A little experience makes one aware of the work culture. A market flooded with a specific qualification also prolongs employability, as suggested by Babalwa. Noticeably, the participant was not willing to relocate and wanted to be employed in their comfort zone or in a province they were familiar with. The availability of entry level HR jobs was identified as another factor which prolongs employability. This is so as available jobs required individuals with extensive HR knowledge and experience.

Table 5.2 below comprises the themes for ‘not employable’ and quotes from participants.

Table 5.2: Not employable themes

Theme	Quote
Lack of work experience	Jane <i>No I did not think I was employable. Due to the fact that I did not have practical work experience. I studied part time and worked thereafter thus I had an advantage over those who studied full times.</i>
Lack of vacancies	Sesethu <i>'No, there were no vacancies. The ones that were advertised required extensive knowledge of HRM prescripts. I had no experience at that time.'</i>
Expectations of the world of work	Noluthando <i>Not yet I think I had the incorrect expectations, especially having done labour law as a module. I was very "aware" of my rights as an employee and it was never emphasised in University that the workplace is a tough place with a lot of bending over backwards, and it can be quite a "thankless" place. When you are in school you knew that working hard on your studies earns you the marks. But in the workplace, going the extra mile with no recognition is a given</i>
Flooded market	Babalwa <i>No, there were too many people with an HR qualification in my province and I was not willing to relocate to a new place</i>
No right qualification for HR	Faith <i>No, wrong degree for profession</i> Craig <i>When I completed my studies I had to do a bridging course so as to qualify in HR. My first job was linked to my first degree</i>

5.4.1.2 I was employable after my first qualification

On the other hand, practitioners who were employable after their first qualification gave a clear account of the traits which they considered made them employable. Such information is potentially invaluable for new job seekers and enables employees to introspect on the underlying qualities identified. Themes which emerged were related to what the individual had done to ensure they fared better for their employers; these included vocational training, volunteering to gain work experience, networking, and right qualification for what they wanted to do, attitude, willingness to learn, working and learning, internships, easy access to job market. The quotes for each theme which emerged are discussed below.

Themes which emerged were, *work experience, networking education, personal attributes, legislation and environment.*

Theme 1 WORK EXPERIENCE

Early volunteering and vocational work experience

Boly and Rob offered their services free of charge to employers during the vacation breaks. In so doing, these participants enhanced their marketability, as volunteering not only gives one experience but helps in developing basic employability skills and work readiness. Since the age of 10, Rob had been doing voluntary work during vacations so that by time he wanted to apply for employment, he was aware of the expectations of the world of work and had many options of employment.

Rob *I work experience I gained since the age of 10 whilst working at a hardware store every weekend and school and university holidays. My leadership position whilst at school and during my university studies count for something.*

Vocational work experiences are key to being employable because one develops a work ethic of working hard before attaining employment which makes workplace adjustment easy. Ann gained competitive advantage by growing her employability skills since being in Grade 10. The sooner one is exposed to the employment environment, the earlier the development of employability skills. Working during vacations prepares one for the world of work, provides numerous networking opportunities and connecting with experts.

University of Fort Hare

Ann *I worked school holiday since grade 10 in various environments. It provided me with an understanding of the world of work. Although no HR experience, I linked up to various experts and extra work to gain exposure.*

Work readiness is best developed by becoming familiarised with the work environment. For this reason, Noluthando, Zubeida and Babalwa all volunteered their services. When one volunteers to do work, financial incentives are not a priority. Noluthando further stated she was willing to get her hands dirty for experience related to HR. Volunteers are welcome in both the public and private sector. According to Chan, Rob and Zubeida, the sooner one starts to volunteer the better one becomes aligned to the labour market.

Chan *During school holidays I volunteered in the government department.*

Mpho *...Volunteering and involvement with any organisations willing to take me up on my offer.*

Noluthando *Nothing out of the ordinary, I just made sure that every person I would come across new that I was an HR graduate looking for any HR related work. I just developed a readiness to get my hands dirty wherever it was as long as the job was in line with my HR studies.*

Siphe *I looked for work, applied in numerous departments, did a lot of walk-ins” present myself – this is what I have to employers. I was not particular on the first job. I started off as a Clerk.*

Zubeida *Networking', volunteering. Working as students irrespective of pay or position to gain knowledge experience.*

Babalwa *I attained other development courses but my starting point was as a volunteer in a government department.*

Practical work experience and internships

Regular volunteer work leads to practical work experience. In order for one to be employable, practical work experience is key as it makes one more aware of employer expectations. Practical work experience provides a feeling of what the world of work offers and enables one to prepare for it. It was evident that some participants chose to do a correspondence course such as attending night classes rather than conventional classes so as to attain the upper hand. Some of the work experience of participants was acquired through mandatory internships. Internships were mandatory especially for the participants who were doing B Tech qualifications. In most cases, employers usually absorb their interns especially if the interns give a good account of themselves. In the case of being funded by an institution or government department, participants stated they were expected to work for that department after the completion of the studies for a period of up to five years.

Siphe *Yes I was employable when I left university, when I left university I got my first job within 3 months, I was a bursary holder at the time from the Ciskei government. It was a return of service. We were compelled to work for the department soon after the completion of my studies.*

Zubeida *I worked part- time whilst studying, I was an intern at Delloite during my honors. My honors program was part-time which allowed me to use my work platform to practice theory.*

Nicole *Yes for entry level position as a student in our honours year we were exposed to practical work and received orientation with regard to the world of work and what to expect. Entering the real world of work was still a challenge as it was new and not 100% what one expected.*

Ludwe *in-service training and networking.*

Sipho *There were many opportunities that were made available to ensure access to the labor market. i.e. internship programs. At the same time, partaking in an internship program almost guaranteed employment as many interns were being absorbed by their employers, which was the case for me also.*

Peter *...had practical work experience and volunteered during vacation, and I got good recommendations from my employers.*

Employers always prefer appointing people with experience. An individual with experience always has the upper hand. Experience can be gained by volunteering services to prospective employers, during internships, or in-service learning. Experience can either be related to the discipline or in general (Thomas), as long as one becomes familiar with the work environment. Where one starts working does not determine where one ends. Some start off in other professions and end up in HR. This arguably is a calling to the profession. When it is a calling alongside passion for the profession there is no stopping people in attaining what they want to achieve. Further education and professional certificates are measures that can be put in place.

Thomas *I did other jobs to ensure I had experience.*

Theme 2 NETWORKING.

Networking

A key attribute to employability is networking as most participants who had jobs before they finished their academic career had networked. Ann had five years of working experience at different employers during her holidays and continuously reminded these places of work of progress made in her studies. Volunteering and internships and walk-ins are among the methods which participants had at their disposal to grow their network. One participant noted that they were spoilt with choices as they had multiple options of who to work for as they had networked and given a good account of themselves. Networking leads to research on the prominent professionals or individuals in an area of choice, it moves individuals closer to their role models, thus equipping them with an upper hand. Networks should be built in the career path one intends to follow. If this is not done, then as mentioned by Ann, it can lead to lack of understanding of practical HR in the workplace.

Athenkosi, Charisa and Ann not only networked but identified the value of networks having faith in one's capabilities and skills being specific to HR. Networking provides options when selecting which organisation to work for.

Athenkosi *Yes, I had already networked, done my research to check what skills are required in the HRM field and equipped myself.*

Ann *From the volunteering I did I was able to create a sound network and when I finished my degree, my job was waiting for me.*

Charisa *I believed I had the skills, I also did a lot of networking such that when the time came I had options to take due to my networks.*

Networking and offering services for free are measures which enhanced opportunities for Zizipho, Ludwe and Zubeida who had networked for employability. Networking ensures that


potential employers are aware of who suitable employees are and where to find them. This ensures being considered when there is a position available. Networking also ensures that when one is invited for an interview, members of the panel are colleagues. This also enhances work readiness skills. Participants' networking took place in both the private and public sector institutions.

Zizipho *I networked and did extra courses so that I could get a job. You know in my first interview I knew all the members in the panel and they knew me and my work ethics, the writing was on the wall the job was mine.*

Ludwe *Networking... you never know who you will meet tomorrow and who might put in a good word for you.*

Zubeida *networking' and volunteering, I don't think these two can be separated as once you volunteer you making a sound network Working as students irrespective of pay or position to gain knowledge experience.*

Recruitment agencies

Recruitment agencies also enhanced employability for Nicole, Jane and Stephen who applied for jobs using this conventional method. Some recruitment agencies mocked real interview questions which enabled individuals to get a  feel of the real interview situation. The mandate of job search and aligning skills to employer requirements is done by the employment agencies. Job search is usually through buying newspapers and identifying job opportunities. Some participants used either method, depending on what was accessible. It is possible to apply for as many positions and arguably numerous employers get to see the incumbents' curriculum vitae. Application for employment can be done by walk-ins, postal, call-ins, and the use of recruiting agencies. In the current political climate in which there are calls for the end in outsourcing, the use of recruitment agencies is becoming unpopular. Although recruitment agencies still exist, technology is making them less popular as most organisations now advertise online.

Nicole *I registered with personnel agencies, role played interviewing skills, networked with co-students to ask about their experiences, used referrals and applied for leaner programs.*

Jane *I bought newspapers and contacted advertising/ recruitment agencies for possible job opportunities.*

Stephen *..applied for as many posts as possible and used recruitment agencies they were able to align my skills to what I wanted to do. I also got a wakeup call from the agencies on enhancing the skills I thought I had and were sufficient.*

Recommendation

Over and above the merits of networking, volunteering and internships are the value of a good recommendation. The benefits of having a good network are recommendations. Recommendations from peers, lecturers and professionals are vital. Once a known credible source puts in a good word, the rest becomes a mere formality and will depend on how one performs in an interview. Recommendations in industry soften the path to employability; especially if the recommending party is a figure who commands respect. The concept of knowing someone who knows someone is indicated by Siphos response who was referred to potential employers.

Sesethu *I was recommended for employment to a few companies but choose the one which first responded to my application.*

Siphos *The people I knew and met along my academic life became useful when I was looking for a job as they referred me to their colleagues who wanted someone fresh from school.*

Extracurricular activities

Being an active member and taking up leadership roles in university was another factor the participants identified. Taking up a leadership role in extracurricular activities develops basic skills such as learning how to plan, organising, lead, and in some cases a bit of project management. Rob and Mpho asserted that the assumption of leadership roles prior to employment develops skills. It pays off at one stage in a career as there will be no culture shock when assuming more responsibilities in a career.

Rob *I assumed leadership position whilst at school and during my university studies count for something. I learnt how to prioritise, even in critical thinking... I was able to travel from the position I occupied, I met a lot of people and it contributed in my career development.*

Mpho *I also had occupied leadership positions in my varsity years.*

Moses *Ensured I had skills set relating to extramural and intramural school activities/education.*

Theme 3 EDUCATION

further education

Sesethu, Lindelwa, Unathi and Penny identified willingness to learn and further education as factors which influenced employability. Being able to be put out of one's comfort zone and take more responsibilities is an advantage currently. The desire to acquire new knowledge

(willing to learn) was a factor mentioned by participants especially for those who did not have an HR qualification. They were in a relatively new environment and they attributed this attitude (desire to acquire new knowledge) to getting to where they were. Sesethu even sacrificed by starting a new qualification in order to understand the language of HR. Willingness to learn in the sense of the study does not only refer to the skills of a job but incorporates the conscious decision to study as one builds the occupation's attributes. Sesethu started off as a prison warden but was able to move to HR by working on the job and acquiring the right qualification for the profession. Regardless of where an individual starts, as long as they plan where they want to go to acquire a career of their choice.

Regarding employability and lifelong learning, participants indicated that in order to be employable they had to constantly reskill themselves to ensure that they did not become redundant. Penny advised that in the current knowledge-driven economy, employees should continually strive to be relevant within their organisations and the economy. Participants who took further education did so for professional development. Some did not have a solid HR background and thus further education was to ensure they set their foundation on HR. Further training can be to grow or be equipped with the necessary qualification.

Faith ...*Further studies.*



Penny *In the current knowledge driven economy, as practitioners we have continuous pressure to keep on developing ourselves so that we keep abreast with the needs of the economy.*

Chan *I studied further to ensure that I am able to progress career wise.*

Babalwa *I attained other development courses and volunteered mostly in government departments.*

Sesethu *My first job was as a prison warden was not by choice and then empowered myself and when an opportunity was available I moved to HR which I loved. To equip myself with the needs of the profession I decided to work and learn at the same time.*

On the other hand, Lindelwa and Unathi worked and studied concurrently. By the time they finished their qualifications, work experience was also in their favour. Work experience with the right qualification enhances prospects for employability and increases the prospects of being promoted.

Lindelwa *Yes, I was already working and studies part time.*

Unathi *Yes, I had studied part-time as I was already working. Furthering my studies helped to become employable and promotion prospects were easier.*

In order to obtain promotion, experience in the current climate is not enough, but taking part in developmental courses and workshops which give CDP points enhances employability. Rob enrolled for VIP payroll training, Craig furthered his education and progressed to a higher level. Further education and training is essential as competition for jobs escalates. Thus, in order to have a competitive advantage to prospective employers, one must continuously learn. Unathi furthered her studies to maintain her competitive advantage over new job entrance, Babalwa did volunteer work.

Unathi *I furthered my studies to ensure that I become more employable as the younger generation has improved qualifications.*

Rob *I got enrolled for VIP HR & payroll systems consultation training which got me my first job as a payroll administrator and that opened doors to an HR officer position which launched my position in my HR career.*

Research on the skills employers require

Ensuring that you acquire skills during the tenure of an academic qualification is also a measure taken to ensure employability. The value of soft skills in employability was highlighted by participants as they are the basic skills for employability. A driver's licence and computer literacy were identified by Athenkosi as the basic employability skills required during his era. Research informs one on the skills prioritised by employers. Some skills are acquired through taking part in social activities, these help one to simulate responsibilities as employers do. Soft skills are also changing and thus computer literacy and having a driver's license would no longer suffice as employability skills and how to look after clients.

Kimberly and Siphon conducted research on the skills employers usually require and equipped themselves to that. Research on employer requirements ensures awareness of what employers require and then putting measures in place to acquire the skills.

Athenkosi *I equipped myself with more courses such as driver's license, computer literacy, communication, teamwork, problem solving, taking initiative, organising and planning, willingness to learn, customer care which were prerequisites at the time.*

Kimberly *I first researched what was required and obtained other necessary skills such as computer literacy (technology), integrity, confidence, intellectual ability, thinking outside the box, good personality and a sound character, planning and organising, being good with numbers (numeracy), analysing situations and making sound decisions.*

Boly *I researched what was required by employers and aligned my academic qualification and skills to that. What employers wanted was good communication skills, a teamworker, problem solver, a future leader, good interpersonal skills, someone with technical expertise, a dependable person, a result oriented person and a bit of business knowledge.*

Sipho *I was very active in doing research on how to access these internship opportunities via the internet. I had to physically go to organisations and speak to HR managers to get the information and market myself. A willingness to learn and taking responsibility either for actions and responsibility in general, self-management and sound time management, creativity/ innovation, confidence in yourself, excellent verbal and written communication in English, moving abreast with relevant technology in the field, ability to interact with others and creating sound networks, thinking and planning strategically, working under pressure, being reliable and acting with professional conduct.*

Simon *...these are the main employability skills which I found employers required; willingness to learn, creativity, being able to cope in an uncertain environment, for HR being sensitive and having communication skills which enables you to communicate effectively in different contexts, volunteering and taking responsibilities, being entrepreneurial, work in a multi-cultural environment, technology and of coz sound knowledge of your area of specialisation.*



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Right qualification

The greatest weapon for employability in the current climate is a qualification which is related to the profession. Traditionally, HR roles were being occupied by people without an HR-related qualification. Studying, although it does not guarantee employment, does provide the theoretical background of the profession. As HR seeks to professionalise, it is necessary to cement the basic qualification. Gabriel got his job before he got his degree, and although it was not HR-related, it was related to the profession he wanted to pursue. Moses, Chan, Zizipho, Lindelwa, Stephen and Kimberly all had a qualification which was relevant to their career choice and they can attest to the merits thereof. A qualification is not enough as Moses adds skill, Chan adds experience and Zizipho knowledge. Arguably, these must be the outcomes of the curriculum in HR.

Jane *Yes the academic qualification forms the ground work gives you the experience to incorporate the ground work, however it is up to yourself to grow within the HR profession which requires constant learning up skilling and dedication.*

Stephen *Over and above my diploma, I would do developmental courses that may come my way.*

Ludwe *Networking and right qualification for the job.*

Moses *I had acquired a diploma and relevant degree. I also had a skills suitable for what I had chosen to do as the skills were which were in demand at the time.*

Chan *Yes, I had the required qualification and experience.*

Zizipho *Yes, I believed I had the right knowledge required by employers.*

Stephen *Yes, my qualification was work related.*

Kimberly *'Yes, I made sure that my qualifications would be able me to get a suitable job.*

Lindelwa *I believed I had the right knowledge required by employers.*

Mpho *...Right degree*

Muhasin *I acquired a qualification in line with what I wanted to do.*

Gabriel *I got my first job before I qualified in my education diploma.*

Studying can be full-time or part-time. Lindelwa conducted part-time studies and the qualification was in line with the occupation. Participants who studied part-time arguably did so to enhance their employability as at the end of a period they had an academic qualification and experience, thus having an upper hand compared to someone who had gone to university. Studying too is not only focusing on the Diploma or Degree as there are several HR professional qualifications certified by the professional body in order to progress. For some, getting a job was related to the completion of an academic qualification.

Lindelwa *I studied part-time to improve myself and enhance my chances of obtaining better employment.*

Craig *When I found my job, I kept on learning, I finished my masters when I was employed and it made my progression shorter. Finalizing my masters made in the short term the higher qualification was not that important, but when I got it accelerated my career progression within the job I had. At the moment I changed jobs this month, my previous role was head of HR southern Africa region, which was a HR focused role which was generalist. The current position I occupy is focused on organisation development with the same company.*

A qualification linked to what you want to pursue is instrumental as this is a sound foundation. It starts with willingness to pursue the qualification. The suitable qualification for entry level ranges from an HR diploma to an HR degree or a Bachelor of Technology. In the current knowledge-driven economy, a matric qualification is not enough to pursue a career and this has forced individuals to adapt and pursue professional qualifications. However, in the current climate, a degree does not guarantee a job due to stiff competition for jobs.

Charisa *Yes, at the time with matric it was enough to pursue a career. However I did programs to ensure I had something to stand on.*

Theme 4 PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Resilience

The power of positive psychology and self-belief can never be underestimated. Individuals who have high levels of positive psychology when faced with adversity do not give up but keep on working hard to ensure they meet their objectives. When they have more self-belief it can be a sound reason why they think they are employable as they have self-belief and have a different outlook regardless of context. Most participants identified the role of positive psychology, and the benefits can be observed from Charisa who detailed how positive thinking and skills developed her and prepared her for the next levels of her career.

Charisa *I believed I had the skills, I also did a lot of networking such that when the time came I had options to take due to my networks. Although it took time to get my first job I never gave up on what I wanted, I knew my time was coming.*

Attitude

Self-belief is a state of mine which seems to enhance employability. Presumably, with a positive attitude towards a career, people are willing to learn and understand how it works. People who are willing to learn, work harder so as to gain an upper hand. A positive attitude is key for HR professionals as they face numerous challenges in the workplace from fighting for new roles to be included in the boardroom to executing their traditional roles. The shortcoming of being overconfident, reiterated by practitioners, is that the current graduates because of their qualifications want to assume more responsibilities and earn more yet they have not mastered the entry HR requirements of administration. A positive attitude and confidence are a good combination when used to meet set objectives as they do not make one seem arrogant. This was highlighted by Ann who lacked practical HR-related work experience but had the mindset to apply what she had learnt. A positive attitude, as derived from Sesethu's narrative, points to changing one's circumstances.

Simon *Yes, my positive attitude and willingness to learn and work harder than the person next to me.'*

Ann *'... To benefit I had positive attitude towards working book knowledge that I was eager to apply one year practical experience. 5 years of holiday work, To my detriment. No practical understanding of real workplace and HR process.*

Sesethu *I kept a positive attitude in as much as it was a challenge to find my first job being positive and never giving up on the ultimate objective kept me going, now look where I am sitting today, if I had given up during those years of job search what would have become of me.*

Positive Attitude

Personal attributes which are the underlying characteristics in individuals influence employability. If an individual's personality is suited to the profession there is likely to be less conflict with their career choice. Personality thus becomes a strength leading to a fulfilling career as interest would have influenced career choice rather than a qualification. Key is the ability to control, be aware and to express emotions in appropriate contexts. Emotional information is used to guide thinking and emotional behaviour. It is necessary to identify one's emotions and those of others facilitating interpersonal behaviour. Behavioural competencies refer to one's approach to a situation. Knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions are behavioural competencies. Positive psychology also is essential as being resilient does more for one to be employable. Sesethu, Ludwe and Faith listed the attributes they believe made them employable.

Sesethu *Emotional intelligence and personality and positive psychology.*

Ludwe *Attitude, Positive psychology, Behavioural competencies.*

Faith *Critical thinking, personality, Emotional maturity.*

The attributes are key to employability, especially in HR as, with emotional intelligence, an incumbent is expected to recognise not only their emotions but those of fellow employees, with positive psychology, never giving up. As each day comes with its challenges, HR is still facing legitimacy challenges as it moves for a seat on the boardroom table.

Creativity

The changes taking place in the world of work require employees to adapt by growing in the situations at work and provide solutions which are long lasting. An academic qualification is no longer enough security for employment as employers require creative employees who are able to think outside the box. In as much as sector specific and technical knowledge are essential, they do not suffice. Creative employees bring new ideas and increase competitive advantage of organisations. Craig and Mpho attested to the merits of creativity to their employability.

Craig *At the current moment things are rapidly changing, a degree is not enough. With creativity I was able to adopt faster and continuously changing.*

Mpho *I am a creative person my reasoning was far from the norm this has always worked in my favour as it has made me stand out from the rest.*

Work readiness

The standard definition of work readiness includes all the soft skills and attributes identified above. However, from the perspective of a job seeker, it not only includes being prepared and believing that one has the attributes and skills to work but also being willing to commence a career. In most cases, failure to adjust is due to a culture shock or the absence of being ready to start. Abbie believed she was mature enough to start working.

Abbie *I was mature enough to grasp opportunities that came my way.*

Siphokazi *I was ready and prepared to start to work, my mind was made up and I was willing ready to go all out to get what I want. This helped me to adjust easily in my first job you know simply put I was punctual, made myself a dependable person, very professional in my conduct, I took initiative, my oral and written communications were above board, was read to work in team and excel as an individual too, critical thinking and problem-solving.*

Passion for the job

Getting a job which one loves occurs when one is mentally, physical, socially and spiritually aligned to a career choice. This passion was observed from Charisa who loved working with people and always knew that regardless of where she started her career, she would end up working in HR. Although not that easy, it requires planning and networking to get to where one wants to go. Passion leads to commitment and engagement to a profession, passionate individuals are enthusiastic and ignite those around them with their passion.

Charisa *...you know I love working with people, if I continued working with numbers I would have quit. With HR it like I was born for this, from emotional intelligence, to competencies, attitudes and behaviours they are all in sync.*

Chan *..with the challenges of legitimacy we face as HR people, passion makes us work up every day, I enjoy my job and the challenges it comes with. This is not to say there are days we are undermined and you feel like going under a bus. Passion makes us come back to what we do.*

Theme 5 Legislation

Work ethic and equity legislation

Simon identified his work ethic, going out of the way to meet set objectives as factors which made him employable. To potential employers this provides an example of candidates who focus on quality.

Simon *I was always willing to go the extra mile as well as ensuring that my work was 100% perfect, neat and on time.*

As South Africa moved from the previous social dispensation, Mpho was given opportunity based on legislation regarding racial balance in the workplace. In the current dispensation, legislation favours previously disadvantaged groups to be employable and accelerate up the hierarchy as long as they meet the criteria for the occupation.

Mpho *'equity also enhanced my employability, legislation was in our favour and companies organisation were keen on meeting quotas set.*

Theme 6, ENVIRONMENT

Easy access to job market

In the previous era, post South Africa's independence, there were numerous opportunities for work especially for individuals with an academic qualification. Participants agreed that over 15 years ago work was readily available and during that era matric would suffice for one to acquire entry level employment. Some chose to study part-time as the market was flexible enough. One participant alluded to the fact that at the time for young black educated people the prospects for employment and career growth were abundant. Previously disadvantaged groups after the collapse of the apartheid regime were more employable as they had access to jobs which previously they had been excluded from. Participants further agreed that currently access is tighter compared to that era. Some participants, for example Siphokazi, already had a job by the time they finished their academic qualification. Above all, it is important to make use of available opportunities in one's environment.

Sipho *Yes, there were many opportunities that were made available to ensure access to the labour market, which was the case for me also.*

Susan *Yes, Work was readily available 15 years ago.*

Siphokazi *Yes, I was already working by the time I started working.*

Muhasin *Yes, the time there were plenty opportunities for educated people.*

Charisa *Employment came to me very easily due to opportunities I received as a result of my networks. At the time with matric, it was enough to pursue a career.*

John *Yes, I started working as soon as I completed matric and studied part time.*

Mpho *Yes, I had the academic qualification, and at the time jobs were more readily available as compared to now. At the time there were many opportunities available for young black males with qualifications and competencies. I grew up in an era in which we believed we were employable as we had academic credentials.*

The background which one comes from is a motivator, growing in an environment with no role models. The environment builds one's character as desires make one grow psychologically. Mpho attributed his enterprising attitude to where he came from; background was not a limiting factor but acted as a motivator. This, however, is only feasible when the person has a plan for what they want to do. The previous environment, as highlighted above, was characterised by numerous job opportunities and the onus was on the individual to grasp what came their way. Also, for previously disadvantaged groups, the New South Africa presents opportunities for growth as most organisations are under pressure to meet equity quotas. With all these are opportunities which the environment provides one simply has to be competent enough to occupy these positions.

Mpho *Circumstance from where I came from made me acquire a go getter attitude. I had a real plan of what I wanted to do after I left university. I liked reading thus was well informed of the market needs...*

For some, the environment and matric were enough to get a job. Moses and Charisa started to work soon after matric whereas Siphokazi started work after finishing a qualification. However, in recent times this notion is met with reservations, as after degrees internships seem mandatory. The enabling environment can be circumstantial or created by the individual. Funding from an organisation for education usually comes with conditions which require employees to offer their services to the organisation providing the funding.

Moses *I started working soon after my matric.*

Charisa *I started working soon after my matric, I had a clerical job, I moved to a recruitment agency for about 5 years, I fell in love with HR, from family too, most of my family members are in HR.*

5.4.1.3 Time to get first job

Practitioners also provided insight into the time it took them to acquire their first job. From Table 5.3 below it can be observed that the majority of the participants took less than a year to acquire their first job. Some of the reasons can be attributed to the environment in which jobs were readily available compared to the current context. Also, as observed, during the previous

era a matric qualification would suffice to make one employable. In the current context, markets are being flooded as there are more graduates being produced by universities than jobs available in the industry. As observed, the environment, unwillingness to relocate, lack of experience and flooding of many people with a similar qualification also influence the time one acquires a job. Babalwa took almost three years just to get formal employment.

Table 5.3: Time to find job

Time	Participants
0-6 months	Jane, Peter; Simon, Noluthando; Siphokazi; Mark; Ludwe; Zizipho; Unathi; Chan Boly, Siphe; Faith; Craig; Mpho; Muhasin, Gabriel, Nicole, Ann, Sipho , Qebo, Zubeida
6-12 months	Stephen; Susan; Lindelwa, Athenkosi; Kimberly. Thomas
12-24 months	N/A
25+ months	Sesethu, Babalwa

Participants, Sesethu and Babalwa, took a relatively long time to acquire employment. Be that as may, the participants noted that they were not sitting at home but volunteered their services to acquire experience as they waited for job openings.

Sesethu *There were no vacancies. The ones that were advertised required extensive knowledge of HRM prescripts. I had no experience at that time.*

Babalwa *There were too many people with an HR qualification.*

Some of the participants had taken less than five months to acquire full-time employment, The followings narratives were generated on why getting their first job was easy.

Muhasin *It was almost instant, as soon as I finished the job was waiting for me. However having good networks helped as there were many options for me.*

Qebo *I did not have to look for one, I was recruited by one of my hosting mentors whose classes I practiced teaching lessons with.*

5.4.1.4 HR employability competencies

Practitioners were requested to identify competencies they regard as essential to employability and to identify the competencies they possess. As we moved towards sector specific employability, the researcher was keen on identifying competencies which are deemed essential for employability in HR. Due to volume of the identified competencies, two figures are used to illustrate the listed competencies. The researcher divided employability competencies into technical competencies and soft skill and behavioural competencies as illustrated in Table 5.4 and Table 5.5. below. These two tables show the competencies

practitioners possessed and the competencies they attributed to employability at the time of data collection.

In the identification of competencies it can be observed that the focus was on the traditional competencies and the modern HR competencies. Practitioners did not argue on the legal acumen and this was due to the socio-political dynamics in the South African economy. All if not most of the competencies in the SABPP competency model were identified and simplified. Semantics was raised as an area of concern as there is more than one way of representing a phenomenon.

Table 5.4: Soft skills and behavioural competencies

• vocational work experience	• Personality	• learn from mistakes
• Practical work experience and internships	• equity legislation	• people person
• Networking	• emotional intelligence	• fast thinker
• Recommendation	• behavioural competencies	• put theory in practice
• easy access to job market	• critical thinking	• Sound written communication
• extra curriculum activities	• emotional maturity	• willingness to learn
• resilience	• initiative	• positive attitude
• Research on employability skills	• problem solving	• work ethic
• right qualification	• attention to detail	• sound verbal communication
• recruitment agencies	• quality oriented	• creativity

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Table 5.5: Technical competencies for employability

Job knowledge/technical		
• HR administration	• Measurement of performance	• Technology
• Keeping abreast with HR trends	• Master all soft skills	• Citizen for the future
• Knowledge of the labour legal framework	• Negotiator	• Basic Finance skills
• understanding organisation needs	• Research	• Trustworthy
• Project management	• Customer care	• Critical thinking
• Job content knowledge	• Recruitment and selection	• Cultural sensitivity
• Confidentiality	• Learning and development	• Ability to implement change
• Strategy (build, conceive and implement)	• Remuneration and benefits administration	• Advanced communication skills
• Talent management	• Mentoring and coaching	• Relationship management
• HR governance	• Employee wellness	• Dispute resolution
• HR risk	• Employee relations	• Team builder
• HR compliance	• Compliance	• Planning and organizing
• Analytics and measurement	• Interpret policies	• Decision taker
• HR and business knowledge	• Interpersonal and communication	• Eye for talent
• Ethics	• Innovation	• Solution creation and implementation
• Personal credibility	• Duty to society	• Leadership
• Organisation credibility	• HR service delivery	

It is essential to note that competencies essential to employability start from the basic soft skills, then move to being sector specific. The specific knowledge comes from HR programmes which are offered by institutions from the standard diploma to the bachelors' degree. What is key is taking the theory from the curriculum and putting it into practice. Driving from the above narrative, one who does internships or volunteers their services before the completion of a qualification is more ready for work compared to one who moves without. Passion for a profession, attitude and personality are factors identified as key to employability in HR. When all else fails, a positive attitude and love for what one does can sustain one. In employability it is difficult to differentiate between competencies and capabilities and based on the participants opinions, they fall within the same category. For one to be employable in HR, it is necessary to portray behaviours which are associated with the profession.

Moses *The identified competencies assist in HR being able to add value to an organisation in terms of it achieving its goals and objectives which assists with employability and career success. I have been retrenched on 4 occasions and because I have been able to show how I as an HR Practitioner have contributed to the organisations where I worked it made me employable and therefore have a successful career. This has assisted even more now that I am an HR Business advisor.*



Rob *if you display the effective use of the competencies then it will make you more employable and trustworthy which in the long run will bring the career success if you sustain and persevere in the use of competencies.*

The technical competencies were identified as the core theoretical areas which HR curriculums must cover. Competencies identified essential for HR employability are the core competencies in the SABPP model; however, as the definition of employability includes lifelong learning principles, all the other competencies must not be ignored as they will apply to individuals as they grow in the workplace. For entry level employability, it is important to know all the new areas of specialisation for HR.

As the drive towards HR professionalisation is gaining momentum, it is essential to identify competencies which professionals have, must have and competencies they will need in the future. Competencies identified in Table 5.5 are technical competencies and competencies in Table 5.4 are the soft and behavioural skills. These are deemed essential as they guide those who are willing to commence an HR career and assess how they fare with the job market.

Participants were required to identify the competencies which they view as essential to HR employability.

Table 5.4 and Table 5.5 show competencies participants possess at the current moment and competencies which practitioners regard as essential for entry level employability. The competencies they possess are for professional development and most of them develop from exposure to the workplace.

Noluthando ... *during the first year I was pushing paper, a messenger, I really wondered if this was what I went to school for and if I had chosen the right profession, I thought these people were intimidated by young person who is highly qualified. With time after I had settled in what I learn began to make sense now. With more responsibilities coming my way, as I reflect on the early years I can say it was too administrative.*

Siphe *There I a relationship between HR employability and competencies, I say because times have changed, not every person can make it in the HR sector. When HR was transaction, anyone who lacked in any department will be transferred to HR. In order for HR to professionalize there is need to align to the competency movement, once competencies required are identified it sets levels of expertise in which office holders can develop along the competency framework.*



Sesethu *in the current job market employability is simply not enough, people have to be creative to be employers rather than wait for opportunities. Competitions is tough, those with entrepreneurial skills to adapt better.*

Mpho *character of one is determined by what one promises they know. Employability requires students put their theory to practice as they market themselves. Competencies are embedding one thus they drive one to the career of their choice. Learners must be taught to talk what they can do. In most cases from interviews they lie on their capabilities and when they are found wanting it raises question on how they were groomed.*

5.5 CAREER SUCCESS

Questions on career success established competencies participants attributed to career success. The section also measured areas of satisfaction with income, salary growth, promotions and career progression.

Zubeida *business needs have evolved and HR is required to step up and add value, without alignment on the HR standards and competencies business does not value HR input it revert to being an administrative function. My opinion, employability and career success can only be achieved when HR is viewed as a credible, value adding contributor to the bottom line. With correct*

competencies, HR practitioners can ensure that people practice ethical, sustainable and value adding

5.5.1 Competencies for career success

A key area of the study was to identify the competencies HR practitioners attributed to their success. Participants identified the competencies they possess and gave them as descriptors to success in HR. As employees move up the organisation hierarchy, they are not only motivated by monetary incentive and they do not occupy positions for the sake of it because it is based on merit. They must have the aptitude to perform at the position they occupy.

To occupy a senior position and be able to contribute meaningfully to the organisation, requires competence in strategy, talent management, HR governance, HR technology risk and compliance, analytics and measurement, and HR service delivery – these are all listed as the essential capabilities for HR. The four pillars of duty to society, ethics, professionalism and HR business and knowledge are key. In order for practitioners to regard themselves as successful, before they master the capabilities and adhere to the pillars in the competency models, they must first possess the basic competencies required within HR. Tables 5.4 and 5.5 identified the competencies which are essential to the employability and subsequent career success – when entering the HR profession, grasping of these competencies is essential before the need of moving up in the organisation.



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Sipho *organisations/ supervisors do not have time to micro-manage, HR professionals should be able to work independently whilst rendering services of high quality. One needs to take ownership of his or her own career by aligning ones left with the needs of employability and career success. This changes from organisation to organisation, from sector to sector, unfortunately a qualification is just not enough.*

It was observed that in the first two to three years of employment the focus is on the HR administrative duties and during this phase an individual is expected to master the core competencies. It must be noted that although concentration will be on the core competencies, the other factors must exist theoretically and one must be able to observe them in the workplace. In order to be successful, it is necessary possess the following competencies listed in Table 5.6 and this must be cemented with a positive attitude.

Table 5.6: Career success competencies

Career success competencies					
Practitioner competencies	F		F	F	
Knowledge and skills and how to apply them to the work context	20	Decision making - collecting and analysing information, forming conclusions and making recommendations or choosing courses of action that are consistent with known facts, constraints and risks, committing actions and risks. Committing action or resources in response to problems or opportunities	15	Accountable	23
Business knowledge and business acumen – plans to work and carry it out	25	Political consciousness	3	Risk assessment and compliance	17
Experience – learn to take initiative and solve problems	30	Ability to change - being able to adapt quickly changing circumstance and respond appropriately to different people, situations, cultures, or environment, being effective when facing unusual or unexpected demands	32	Professional conduct	18
HRIS, payroll,	7	Meeting setting objectives	9	Sound arithmetic skills	15
People skills and people management	35	Conceptual skills		Competency modelling	4
Grievance handling procedures, mediation, arbitration	35	Meeting by objectives (start with the end in mind)	3	Culture of work	6
Consumer behaviour	32	Organisation behaviour	5	Report writing	28
Training and development	35	Objectivity	7	Project management	
Administrative skills	35	Highly ethical		Traditional HR competencies	
Leadership	35	Building partnerships - identifying, developing, and maintaining lasting business partnership with individuals	25	Move from transactional HR to integrated human resources which encompass the modern HR needs to drive the organisation	30
Management	29	that can provide the organisation with enhanced capabilities, costs efficiencies or expertise	18	Mentorship	19
Academic qualification and sector-specific knowledge	28	Persuasion/influencing - using effective interpersonal strategies to change opinions, guide action or affect the emotions of others	17	Critical thinking - using logic and reasoning	25
Constant updates with employer requirements	19	Change management - facilitating the acceptance and successful implementation of new process	19	Emotional maturity - handling anger, envy, anxiety, resentment, and other negative emotions in a manner which does not affect performance or interaction with others.	19
Trustworthiness	18	Reviewing and appraising the work of others, providing performance feedback (set and review performance standards)	16	Initiative/ motivation-acting with urgency to achieve	24
Decision making	24	Translates and anchors business strategy into goals and daily practices of individuals and teams to shape the desired performance culture and drive sustainable results, simultaneously incorporates the long term picture and short term view to make decisions that balance risks and returns.	24	Training needs analysis	24
Teamwork	28	Communication - clearly conveying and receiving messages to meet the needs of all (verbally and written)	30	Job evaluation	25
Productivity	14	Resource management	14	Health and safety	30
Planning	16	HR compliance	19	Budget	29
Commitment	10	Customer care	16	Legal compliance	30
Cultural sensitivity	29	Personnel management	25	Employee wellness, employee wellness strategies	30
Innovation				Organisation development	29

Restructuring, mergers, acquisition and downsizing (manage)	26	Strategic thinking	28	Coaching and mentoring	16
Problem-solving skills	33	Strategic influence	18	Managing teams	
Work family conflict	35	HR service delivery	19	Learning and development	25
Conflict management skills	32	Conflict resolution	35	Benefits administration, remuneration and benefits	30
Management skills budget	16	Handling people with disabilities	6	Employment relations	34
Listening skills	18	Job analysis	14	HR policies	32
Employee relations	9	Chronic illness and psychological contract balance	3	Quality of life	24
One must have the heart for work	24	Employee engagement	35	Managing change in organisations	16
Appointments must be made on merit and ability	30	HR service delivery	32	Able to work under pressure go the extra mile	17
On boarding in most organisations	6	Salary and wage reviews	35	Networking	30
Emotional intelligence	15	Business partner	30	HR utilisation planning and development	14
Relationship builder – internal and external	13	Negotiation skills	32	Mastering the traditional HR competencies	16
Understand the value of relationships	13	Highly ethical	33	Recruitment and selection	35
Be a coach	4	Interpersonal skills	24	Business partner	16
Personality	13	Job analysis	34	Being entrepreneurial	16
Supervisory skills	5	Dispute resolution	35	Workforce planning	35
Marketability	7				

Key F= frequency

Craig it is difficult to say whether these competencies make one employable. The model however is relevant when one occupies an HR role or in a team. This approach is very useful as it serves as a guide on what one is doing as a practitioner. Jumping from student to the workplace, it is all that useful.

A person should know this as it will be useful at some point in their career. A really good grasp of the competency model. The challenge is, When you leave university you occupy a very junior role. You have no contact with strategy talent management, maybe basic service delivery managing leave. Payroll, various admin tasks

Knowing strategy will not help you that much, they can recruit you for a competency that they know they will need in 5 years' time. Ideally this should be happening. Unfortunately a lot of recruiters in organisations do not have the long term focus in mind. They want practical things that one can do immediate pay roll HR admin

Which is a challenge for university as we have a too theoretical approach to solving HR which in not all that useful in the first part of your career. Students from a technikon can walk in and blend within a department they will have done experiential learning which is more practical. This is good for the first 2 years are so, but of the person is expected to stay for 10 years and move to a senior role you feel the gap of a university degree, as you will need people to contribute to strategy

It makes it difficult to call though, I would prefer to take one who struggle at first but have better potential in the long terms as they will add value in the long-term. As they can do more further down the line even though they may struggle in the interim. Not all recruiters do this.

My advice to those doing degrees is during holidays to volunteer in an organisation. To get a bit of the practical work experience. Feedback also is not properly conveyed from employers to universities on what they need. Universities are not open to adjustments of what employers need which is a pity.

The merit of mastering theory engraved in the curriculum is observable from career progression. Theory as indicated by practitioners does not play an essential role in the first few years of employment, even in the first interview. Employers first want an incumbent who they can teach and has mastered that learning is lifelong. However, as one progresses up the hierarchy, theory plays a significant impact for one to succeed. The argument being that once you master theory underpinning HR, your ability to move to a leadership role becomes more attainable.

A job incumbent is the driver of their own leadership development. However, for some, the mentorship programmes equip them to move up the hierarchy.

Faith *..to get to the position I occupy I attribute it to the support structure within the organisation. We have a mentorship program and at first I saw no need for it but it really pushed me out of my comfort zone. From this I was able to grasp the core competencies, and to sum it up it ended up being a succession planning exercise as I took the reign from my mentor.*

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For some practitioners entrepreneurial intension or orientation was a key attribute to their success. This can be observed from Moses whose position was made redundant and he started his own successful HR consulting organisation. Nicole also started at an organisation and moved to independent practice. In the current climate of mergers and restructuring, entrepreneurial intension ensures one is relevant to the market.

5.5.2 Career success themes

Figure 5.2 below shows the themes which emerged on the meaning of career success to HR practitioners. The identified themes included contribution to strategy, being entrepreneurial, enjoying what one does, support from organisation, mastering HR competencies, income career planning and career progression.

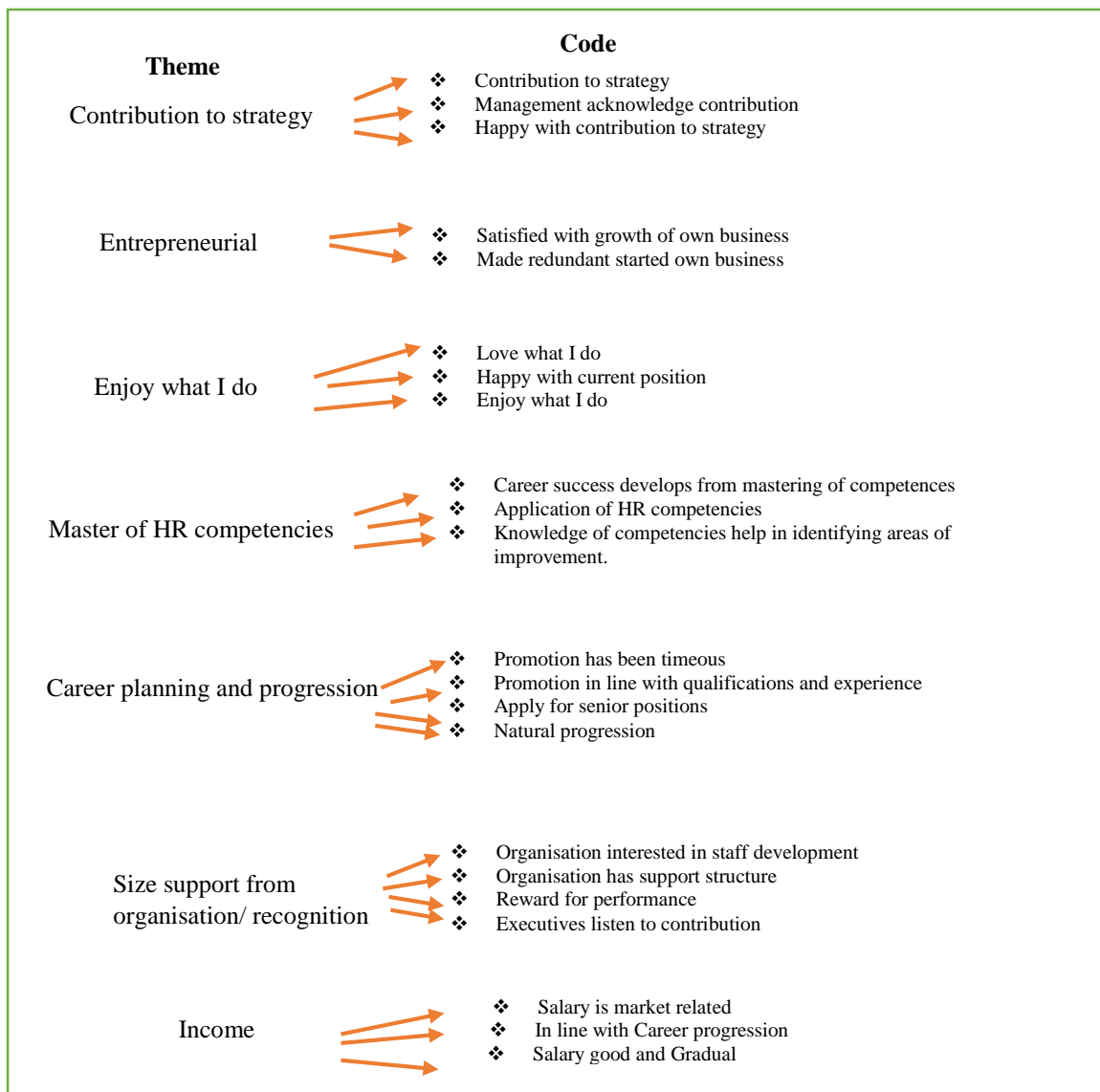


Figure 5.2 Career satisfaction themes

Contribution to strategy

Contributing to the strategic needs of organisations was the most revealed theme relating to career success. Practitioners were implying that as long as you occupy a senior position in HR and you do not contribute to strategy or a seat in the boardroom you do not know what career success is in the HR context. Susan and Ann were also involved in change in the organisation – they thus they showed satisfaction with their roles and it spoke to their interest and was one of their strong areas. Jane was satisfied as senior executives acknowledged the contributions she was making to the boardroom.

Ann *It allows me to consult at executive level/ strategic level- my area of strength and interest.*

Gabriel *I am happy with the current position I occupy and the contributions I make in HR. Money is never enough but at my age it is not a motivator.'*

Jane *Executive management-listen and asked for my input relating to business matters, recognition received (monetary and non-monetary).*

Entrepreneurial orientation

For some practitioners being entrepreneurial was key to their success. As mentioned before, this can be observed from Moses whose position was made redundant and he then started his own successful HR consulting organisation. Nicole also started at an organisation and moved to independent practice. In the current climate of mergers and restructuring, entrepreneurial intension ensures one is relevant to the market. Moses's position was made redundant and rather than sitting at home, despite having reached the retirement age, opted for entrepreneurship and started his own HR practice. Moses opted for the entrepreneurial orientation after years of experience.

Moses *Yes, Some 4 years ago at the age of 57 my position as an HR Executive was made redundant. Other than relocating from the Eastern Cape and/or leaving the country job opportunities for pale males of my age are virtually non-existent. I took the conscious decision to work for myself.*

Nicole who left a formal job for independent practice, was not satisfied with the current income they she was earning but they indicated that during for a formal job the salary was good enough as it was market related. Moses as an entrepreneur was motivated by the growth of his organisation.

Moses *I am happy with the growth and progress of my business. This has been as a result of my own initiative and hard work using my HR and Business skills set to grow the business.*

Enjoy what I do

Stephen, the Head of HR, was satisfied with the position he occupied as he was passionate about his work and happy with the impact his role has in making a difference in people's lives. Gabriel and Mpho were satisfied with their portfolios as they occupied jobs they enjoyed doing. Enjoying what one does is a motivator as alluded to by Mark on how passion is key to enhancing employability.

Mpho *Yes, Because I enjoy what I do*

Mark *Passion is also hey to employability. One's marketability and how they align themselves to the needs of the market influences employability.*

Stephen *Yes, I am in a position which makes a difference in people's lives, am doing what I love.*

Gabriel *I am happy with the current position I occupy and the contributions I make in HR. Money is never enough but at my age it is not a motivator.*

Master of HR competencies

It was observed that in the first two to three years of employment the focus is on the HR administrative duties and during this phase an individual is expected to master the core competencies. It must be noted that although concentration will be on the core competencies, it is also important to observe the other theoretical factors in the workplace. When one has mastered the HR competencies, they can be used for career progression as one is capable to perform their mandate and become more employable as one progresses.

Mark *I believe competencies are developed after employment the tentative tears develop competencies. Career success develops from mastering competencies and being capable to perform.*

Unathi *The identified competencies enable HR practitioners to chart their career progression and identify areas where one can improve.*

Qebo *If you are well competent, enjoying what you do and serious about it, applying yourself the right way, the right motivation and attitude, no shortcuts, being on top of your game (right mixture of research and innovation), keeping the right company (networking about your trade business, your career prospects are likely to improve.*

Ludwe *it can be observed as one progresses through their career. Competencies are an essential element to one being employable but require to be cemented in order for career success to be achieved, career success grows beyond the set of competencies and require attitudes and behaviour.*

Career planning and career progression

From the above theme, the job incumbent can plan their career progression and it will be easy to achieve their mandate when they have most if not all of the HR essential competencies. A job incumbent is the driver of their own leadership development. However, for some the mentorship programmes equip them to move up the hierarchy. The pace of growth, as alluded to by Mark, can play a defining role in career development.

Jane who is the Group HR Director was satisfied. Her satisfaction was attributed to the responsibilities as she sat on the Board and they were making significant contributions to the organisation. Siphe was happy with the position he occupied. A challenging environment was identified as a source of satisfaction and motivation for practitioners. HR practitioners were

requested to indicate whether they were satisfied with their promotions and career progression. Jane, Moses, Simon, Rob, Stephen, Ludwe, Babalwa and Athenkosi were satisfied with their career progression and cited hard work as the reason why they had moved up the hierarchy. Experience was a factor which made them progress and be promoted within their career. An academic qualification (Ludwe, Babalwa) and professional qualifications were identified as instruments which resulted in progress in their career. Babalwa was a new appointee and at the present moment was satisfied.

Ann *It allows me to consult at executive level/ strategic level- my area of strength and interest.*

Craig *Yes I am currently satisfied, compared to my age it's quite a stretch as it is a senior role and am leaving the continent to Europe.*

Babalwa, Lindelwa, Athenkosi, Boly and Thomas were satisfied as they all had recently been appointed to their portfolios. They were enjoying the new roles which they had to play and were looking forward to make more a contribution to their respective organisations. Chan was satisfied to be making sufficient progress in line with what he had planned in his career. Craig had also recently been promoted and was migrating to Europe for a senior role within the same organisation. Negotiation skills also entitle employees to more income – the better negotiator you are, the more you are likely to earn.



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The careers of Ludwe, Kimberly and Faith were growing in line with their academic accomplishments and experience and thus were happy. Muhasin added age to experience and qualification. Nicole proffered that all is good as long as there is progression and growth within the organisation with one's experience and education qualification being considered.

Nicole *Yes, it was a natural progression from corporate senior management role to consultation/ mentoring.*

Susan *They have been timeous with experience and academic qualification.*

Mark *I grew very fast in the first 5 years and it made a big difference to my personal career development.*

Organisations which invest in their employees' welfare, give room for growth internally and thus availing prospects for promotion. In such organisations, there is vertical mobility which improves career development prospects. Organisations, among them government departments, have internal processes which one must subscribe to in order to be promoted internally. Lindelwa, Zizipho, Unathi, Chan and John stated that application for new posts enhances

employability. The system encourages individuals who believe they deserve to be higher up have and who thus apply for promotion.

Unathi *Currently one has to apply for a position in order to be employable.*

In the case of Mpho, the structure of the hierarchy created growth prospects. Noluthando and Babalwa identified the lack of planning as a factor which stagnates personal growth. Size of organisation influences career success as the bigger the organisation, the more resources it has, and the more room for career progression. In addition, large organisations generally pay competitively

Support from organisation/recognition

When one is unhappy about the lack of support or roles which are not challenging, then migrating can be a solution. Zizipho was occupying a senior HR manger role for over 10 years and was looking to move up to a more challenging role. Zizipho was applying for internal promotion during the time the study was conducted. From organisational support, Faith was mentored and this moved her out of her comfort zone and she was able to progress. When an organisation rewards and recognises those who perform there is also room for growth and promotion.



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Nicole *I worked for a company who invested in their staff and celebrated internal growth and promotions.*

Faih *..to get to the position I occupy I attribute it to the support structure within the organisation. We have a mentorship program and at first I saw no need for it but it really pushed me out of my comfort zone. From this I was able to grasp the core competencies, and to sum it up it ended up being a succession planning exercise as I took the reign from my mentor*

Jane *I am rewarded and recognized for good performance.*

Craig *Salary wise I am happy, the salary growth has been good and gradual.*

Jane *Executive management-listen and asked for my input relating to business matters, recognition received (monetary and non-monetary).*

Salary and salary growth

In line with the objective career success, money is a motivator and it must increase as one is moving up the hierarchy. Nicole indicated that during her formal job the salary was good enough as it was market related. Charisa, Muhasin, Jane, Gabriel, Faith, Simon, Stephen, Mark and Ludwe were all satisfied with their salary as it was within the range of what the market determines. Although some were receiving salaries which were market related, they were not

satisfied as they had identified the weakening rand and stated that one is never satisfied with money. Although satisfied, others like Mark noted there is always room for more. The more one is rewarded for outputs the more dedicated one becomes to the job. Gabriel stated that although money is never enough it is no longer a motivator.

Jane *Because its market related and the more dedicated you are the more rewarding it becomes.*

Sipho *Partially, no one is ever satisfied I am not complaining.*

In relation to salary growth participants who were satisfied identified reward for good performance, the growth of the salary if gradual is good. It must be in line with the progression of the career. Working hard ensures or almost guarantees employees that their income will grow with their progression. Noluthando, a practitioner who was underutilised was satisfied with the salary as it was in line with responsibilities.

Noluthando *Considering that I am under-utilized, the salary is satisfactory and market related.*

Jane *I am rewarded and recognized for good performance.*

Craig *Salary wise I am happy, the salary growth has been good and gradual.*

Figure 5.3 below shows the themes which emerged for HR practitioners. Areas of dissatisfaction were also identified from practitioners and these were: *being underutilised, lack of concise career path, always greener out there, monetary dissatisfaction, glass ceiling and lack of contribution to strategy.*

It is always greener out there

Siphokazi's source of dissatisfaction was that it always seems 'greener on the outside'. There are organisations which offer better opportunities than what the current organisation offers. When unhappy with the lack of support or roles are not challenging, migrating can be a solution. Zizipho was occupying the senior HR manager role for over 10 years and was looking to move up to a more challenging role. Zizipho was applying for internal promotion during the time the study was conducted. Unathi, a deputy director of HR cited that her experience and qualifications were enough to move up the hierarchy but this was not taking place due to tight competition and few senior vacancies available. The size of an organisation can hinder success and one might not use or test the effectiveness of competencies and the organisation might not have the resources to pay or keep skilled personnel.

Siphokazi *No, there are always greener pastures.*

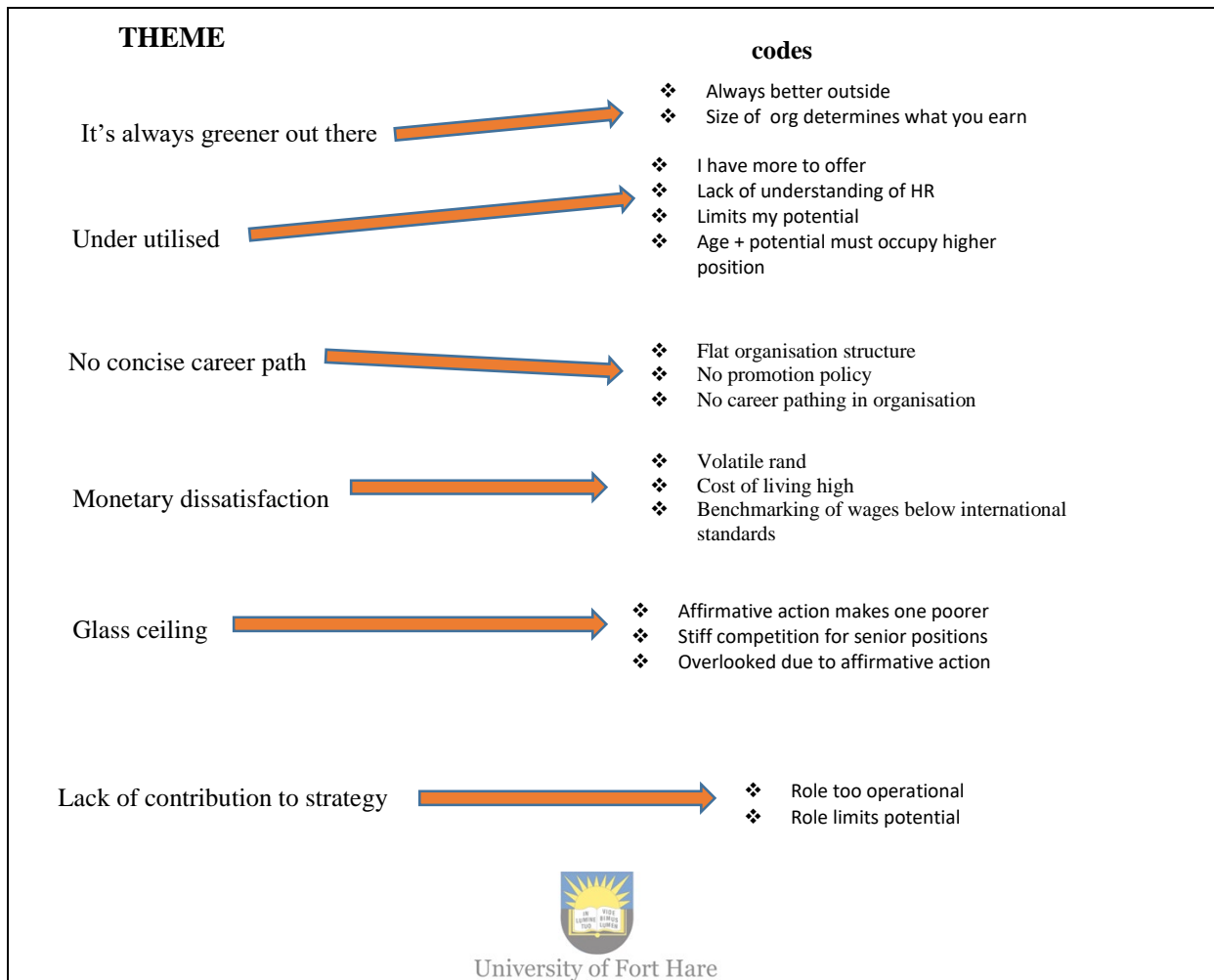


Figure 5.3: Career dissatisfaction factors

Penny From experience, larger organisation pay more, and have more responsibilities however it also comes to smaller organisations one cannot assess the effectiveness of competencies and fewer responsibilities within the organisation.

Underutilised

Participants who were not satisfied with the position they occupy stated that the main reason was that their role was too operational. This meant that as the group HR manager, Muhasin's job description was inclined towards the traditional HR duties. Sesethu alleged that the role she occupied limited her potential on what they could contribute meaning they were being underutilised. Noluthando felt underutilised as their organisation seemed not to understand the role of HR. When an organisation does not see the worth of HR it leads to dissatisfaction as employees' efforts go unappreciated.

Sipho *I believe that I have more to offer than what I'm required to offer, my contributions is confined and limited.*

Noluthando *Not at all I feel under-utilized, and because there is a lack of understanding about the role of HR in the organisation, there is not much support. There are no prospects of growth, soon I will lack ambition, maybe I need to do more so as to get promoted and get more responsibility, I think I am in my comfort zone, I am not learning anything new work has become too routine.*

Sesethu *Promotion for me must come from the employers' side, from my side I had to work hard to be promoted, I had to take a year off from the organisation to do a consulting role and come back to a higher role. From the organisation they are quite good. However in most instances ones negotiating powers determine how much one earns, in the current context my organisation is going through a few financial challenges thus asking for more is rather selfish'*

Babalwa *No my age and experience, I must occupy a higher position.*

Sesethu *Not really, it limits my potential.*

No concise career path and thin organisation structure

Noluthando, Sesethu and Babalwa identified that their organisations did not have clear career paths and thus it was a challenge to track their career progression. Some organisations, as alluded to by Noluthando, do not have clear benchmarking. Some organisations did not have a full HR department and thus there was a limit to the promotions and employees could not plan their career progression within the organisation. This limited salary growth. Muhasin identified that a flat organisation hierarchy does not have many options for growth. Thus prospects of moving up are dependent on the availability of positions.

Muhasin *They have always been in line with progression, it is important to note that in organisations which are flat, there is less prospects for moving up. Being promoted is dependent on the available positions.*

Mpho *No promotion my organisation as a thin structure thus there are fewer growth prospects. Promotion in most cases in through external means. Apply elsewhere then counter offer. Positions too are subject to availability.*

Noluthando *There is no career-pathing, or planned development for one's career. My own personal one, yes.*

Sesethu *There is no working promotion policy that allows people to progress in their chosen careers.....Is far low for a professional and experienced person.*

Babalwa *No there is no clear career pathing.*

Monetary dissatisfaction

Practitioners who were not satisfied with their salary and progression gave reasons, among them were personal challenges which made them require more income. Rob stated that most organisations do not pay as well for the same position compared to their developed world counterparts. This sentiment is shared by Qebo and Zubeida who had experience of working outside the country and coming back home. Practitioners who had worked as expatriates earned more as expatriates than in South Africa. Zubeida took a salary cut so as to work in the country. The cost of living too is very high thus the lack of relationship between professional accomplishments and personal development. The size of the organisation also determines how much one earns. Practitioners who work for bigger reputable organisations are also likely to earn more as it will be in line with the responsibilities they have. The value of the rand also played a role, especially for participants who had worked as expatriates and their salaries had been in US dollars. Now they had to take a salary cut to work in South Africa. The current volatility of commodities is making the rand a volatile currency as it is constantly fluctuating and to the sense of dissatisfaction. The current cost of living in South Africa was also mentioned by participants.



Sesethu *It does not tally with the current cost of living and no offer opportunities to personal development.*

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Noluthando *There is no benchmarking of salaries within my current organisation and no planned path on how ones salary can grow.*

Mark *No incremental increase when you are employed vs job related is always contentious. In order to earn a market related salary you need to resign salary vs budget not realistic.*

Mpho *Financial needs and challenges, some entities can afford to pay more. I have needs which go beyond the income I earn the size of the organisation in most cases determines how much one would earn.*

Rob *Personally I feel that HR professional with more than 12 years' experience in both a South African and international capacities together with my qualifications I should be earning between 800 000 to 1 mil.*

Qebo *I have worked as an expatriate in various African countries on engineering, construction and mining projects and got paid in US dollars which does not compare with the salary I now earn back in South Africa for two years.*

Zubeida *My earning potential overseas was much higher. Having moved back I've had a downgrade in salary.*

Stiff competition and size of organisational glass ceiling

Mark had been in the same position for 11 years and thus his career had stagnated. Unathi, a deputy director in HR, cited that her experience and qualifications were enough to move them up the hierarchy but this was not taking place due to tight competition and few senior vacancies. Peter was not satisfied with his progression and stated that affirmative action was one of the main reasons which hindered his progression. Although some participants were not satisfied with their promotions, citing the congruent nature of the hierarchy, they were personally satisfied with their career progression. Peter who is an HR manager gave a mixed response as he was satisfied and unsatisfied at the same time. Affirmative action was another reason participants gave for why they were not getting enough money and why they did not progress up the hierarchy (Peter). Most senior positions are reserved for equity as pressure mounts on organisations to redress the imbalances.

Unathi *Based on my experience and qualifications I should have been in a senior management but competition is tight.*

Peter *I am satisfied in that I still have a few challenges to meet. I am not satisfied because I know I could have done much better wasn't it that I was overlooked as a result of affirmative action.*



Peter *Gradually I became poorer because of affirmative action...*

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Mark *I have been in the same post for the past 11 years, most positions have been reserved as equity positions.*

Lack of/not contributing to strategy

From the participants it could be observed that organisations in which the strategic role of HR was not being taken into consideration was a source of dissatisfaction as most if not all participants who were dissatisfied rested their sentiment on lack of appreciation for what they do. In spite of the negative sentiments, it is also interesting to observe that in South Africa, the strategic role of HR is being taken seriously. The dissatisfaction was due to being overlooked as HR focused on the administrative duties. Along the same line, Noluthando and Siphso felt their organisation was not using their role effectively as the organisation lacked understanding about the roles, with lack of support from top management as the reason given. In organisations where HR practitioners are not recognised for their input, participants stated that with their experience and professional etiquette was not being recognized (Sesethu).

Lack of involvement in strategic thinking was identified as the major source of frustration.

Simon *No, too operational.*

Sesethu *Not really, it limits my potential.*

5.6 HR COMPETENCIES

Participants also discussed the relevance of the SABPP competency model. Practitioners commented on the applicability of the SABPP competency model to the workplace and identified competencies which were relevant to their work context. They also identified areas of concern in their critique of the SABPP competency model. Their opinions are discussed next.

5.6.1 The SABPP competency model clearly addressing the essential HR competencies

Participants were requested to assess the applicability of SABPP competency model. The researcher was keen in understanding how the competency model fares for practitioners in South Africa. Participants gave a yes or no answer and then gave reason for their answer, as addressed below. The themes were classified as

- i) competency model is sufficient for yes
- ii) competency model has shortcomings for no.



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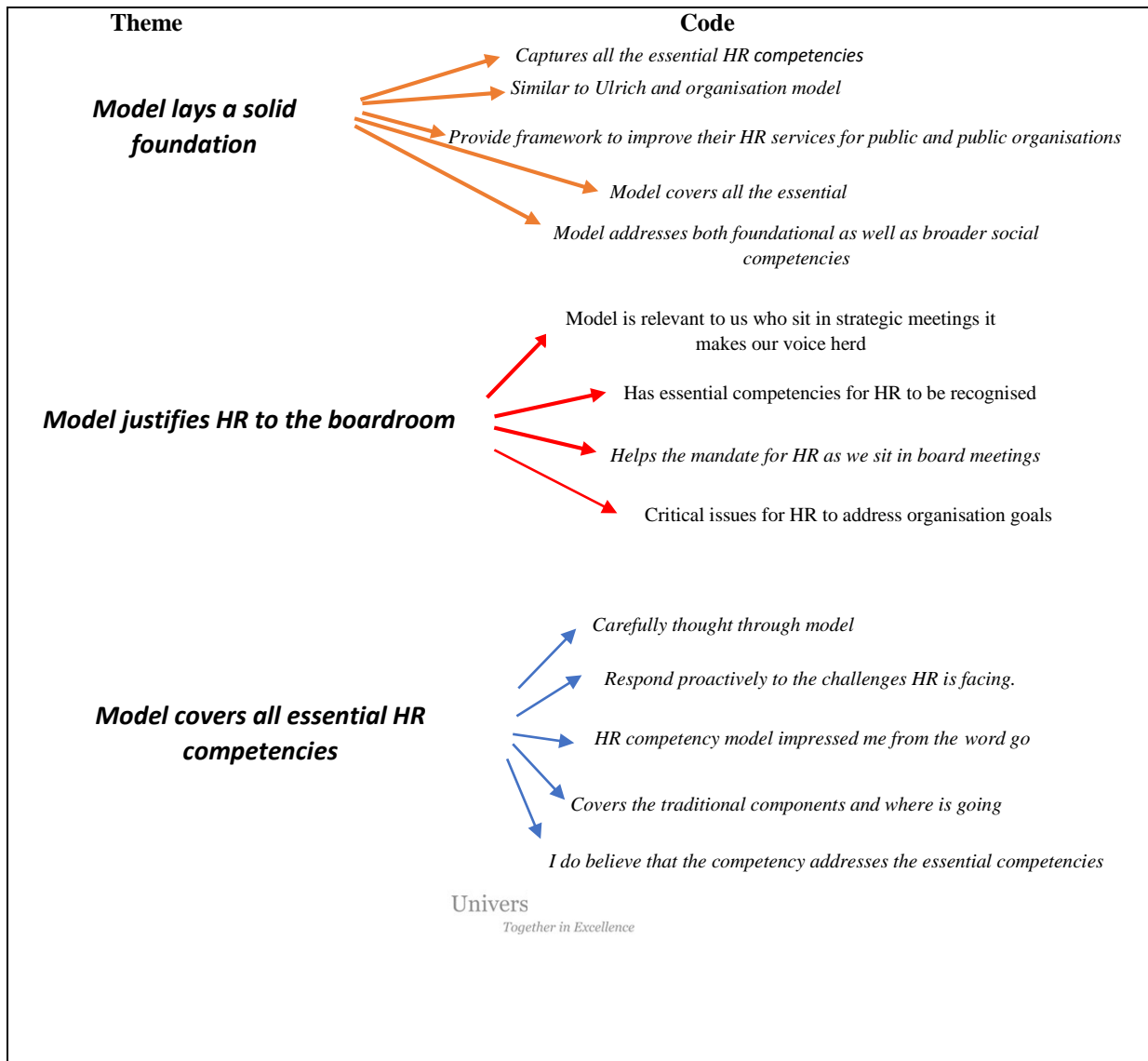


Figure 5.4: SABPP competency model impact

5.6.1.1 Competency model is sufficient (Yes)

The SABPP competency model according to Jane and Moses clearly addresses the essential HR competencies in South Africa. However, as identified by Moses, there is need for implementation in employees' workplace so as to ensure they work. A practitioner is always supposed to be resolute when fighting for legitimacy and needs to be a strategic player which is easier when they have a sound comprehension of finance. Simon complimented the SABPP competency model as it speaks to the critical issues which HR needs to be focused on so as to achieve goals in the organisation. The themes are illustrated in Figure 5.4 above.

Model lays a solid foundation

The SABPP competency model is useful to practitioners in South Africa and it is being used by practitioners as a prototype at their organisation. Some organisations are aligning the framework of the models to that of their respective organisation, such as the public service. The model identifies most if not all the competencies for a fruitful career in HR. The onus is on practitioners to make it suit their environment. It talks to the HR needs of the country. Organisations which had competency models prior to this, identify the similarities of the SABPP competency model to those in their organisations. The mandate to act on the challenges of the world of work is solely on HR and how it responds to such challenges.

Kimberly *...it captures all the essential HR competencies require for a successful career in HR. It provides the country's competency framework for HR. As practitioners we need to expand it to suit our organisations.*

Unathi *it does provide framework to be used by organisations to improve their HR services*

Lindelwa *the model covers all the essential competencies and the public service is busy adapting theirs aligning it to the SABPP one.*

The model as observed by Faith looks like an extension of the work of Ulrich. However, the merit is that it talks to the South African context. The model provides a sound benchmark for HR competencies as alluded to in the responses of Chan and Susan. It ensures HR success in the organisation and highlights the key competencies which practitioners can focus on.

Faith *..Tested them against our own framework and that of ULRICH all very similar.*

Chan *Yes it encompasses all aspects to ensure that HR is successful in an organisation.*

Susan *Yes gives good focus on the important competencies that define our role as HR.*

Model justifies HR to the boardroom

HR practitioners are advised to have personal credibility and leadership skills at a personal level. Sound knowledge of the organisation which practitioners work in and business acumen enable them to handle queries and gain trust from senior personnel. HR practitioners face different challenges and are required to act on them each day; thus problem-solving skills and customer orientation are essential for each day of work. HR must have sound communication

skills as they deal with people's problems and maintain professional conduct. Innovative ways or innovation is required to deal with challenges and people's problems. HR professionals must never forget the traditional roles they are supposed to play and must also keep up with the new requirements of the profession.

Rob *Yes to a large extent. The seasoned academics and professionals who have put the model together have captured the bulk of it, included most aspects and laid a solid foundation, but there is room for further improvement as the HR environment gets and better.*

Siphe *I am familiar with the SABPP model, they have presented the model I am a member and I keep abreast with the challenges HR is facing. The model is relevant to us who sit in strategic meetings it makes our voice heard. We have a framework for the competencies in our department's win which we set standards which all HR department should all comply with.*

Simon *Yes it speaks to all the important/ critical issues in which HR should and must play a role in order for a company to achieve its goals.*

Charisa *It helps the mandate for HR as we sit in board meetings. Its an ideal (idea/ ideology) of how HR should look like. Maybe other sectors that have no respects and do not understand the mandate HR has to deal with. We as practitioners must ensure that views of those who do not share the same mandate with us drive us. Which seems to be taking place at the current moment. As HR we must pick our buckles, focus on our mandate and make changes, take control of the situation and the SABPP is the guide towards that mandate.*

Zizopho *...yes as it does entail all the relevant information to be utilized by HR which will allow HR to be recognized within the organisation.*

Zubeida *Yes. The SABPP model addresses both foundational as well as broader social competencies. The core competencies highlight the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to deliver on HR strategic goals and are built around the unique features driving strategy. It is also useful that the competency model focuses on the levels of work as it indicates to practitioners what it takes to sit in these roles. This can be a useful tool for business partners as this sets the standards of what their business partners should be bringing to the table.*


The model is relevant as it gives practitioners in South Africa a ground to stand on in the fight for the relevance of HR in South Africa. Such a framework of the competency model can be used by organisations in improving the HR services they offer. The model represents a sound ideology for HR and sets room for the intangibles as it identifies the core competencies of HR and which are unique to the profession. It gives sound backing for HR especially to practitioners who sit in the boardroom. It also supports the business partner role in the

organisation. For practitioners to harness the effectiveness of the model, it must be implemented in one organisation.

Model covers all essential HR competencies

The SABPP competency model was highly rated as it focuses on essential competencies and gives direction to HR. It clearly defines the role HR professionals play, it fuses both traditional and modern competencies, thus giving focus and a direction of where HR is going. Nicole praised or complimented the model for covering all the basic areas within HR and HR service. Siphokazi shared the same sentiment and agreed that the model covers the traditional and future HR competencies. Ann was impressed with the introduction of the model as it provides a holistic orientation to HR.

Nicole *Yes It is carefully thought through model and covers all the areas of HR and HR service delivery. I believe it covers the essential elements.*

Mpho *Yes and no partially, HR has a choice to respond proactively to the challenges they are facing. As managers we act with concern and we have to be reactive to what is thrown at us. In the South African economy there are numerous challenges. There are many models. Most of us use models tailor made to suit our environment. There is also  nothing new as there is not much difference with the Ulrich's models. To me it looks lie and issue of semantics as HR is Global these days.*

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It problematic as it seems some models are imposed and in most cases they do not talk to what is happening in the organisation. Circle of concern, and circle of influence.

Boly *Yes, it covers the essential areas to ensure that HR will be regarded as business partner in the organisation.*

Ann *the HR competency model impressed me from the word go as it..*

- *Allows for all essential HR processes*
- *It covers strategy + implementation/ operations + governance + measurement*
- *It includes intra and interpersonal competence (foundation competence)+ innovation (future focus)*
- *It allows for SA context- yet applicable to international (4pillars).*

Siphokazi *It covers the traditional components and where is going.*

Peter *I think so. It addresses all the fields.*

Stephen complimented the model as it is easy to understand and is relevant to HR. Muhasin added that as HR moves towards professionalisation, such a frameworks, like the SABPP competency model, offers a solid platform for its justification. Mosses

summed its up in by stating that in order for the framework to work, implementation in the workplace is key.

Stephen *Yes. They are clear and essential to HR.*

Moses *Yes however one needs to develop the ability to implement these competencies in the work place, be able to think on ones feet, have the ability to implement strategy and have a good understanding of finance.*

Noluthando *Yes, I do believe that the competency addresses the essential competencies. A true HR professional needs to display leadership qualities and personal leadership in their own personal capacity. Knowledge of the company and good business acumen helps the HR professional to be able to handle queries at the level that can be trusted by her peers. HR is presented with difficult situations and decisions to be made on a daily basis, and one needs to be a problem solver. Because HR professionals deal with people, your communication needs to be professional and at the required levels at all times. An HR professional needs to be always finding innovative ways of dealing with traditional problems, and they must be abreast of current best practices and trends.*

Muhasin *HR seeks to professionalize the competency model serves as a framework. We can only be taken seriously as a profession once there are clear cut standards for the profession. The model is thus very relevant to our landscape.*

The model is generic as it covers most if not all the spheres HR operates in. The scope of the model is relevant to generalists and upwards. However, for those new in the profession (beginners) it becomes a bit too complex to follow. In a nutshell, more guidance is required and more examples for the meaning of terms.

Qebo *In one hand it does as it is generic. I believe it has been presented in this fashion so that it cover general aspects applicable for the different spheres of governance for instance educational institutions, government and public, civic (municipality), private sector and parastatals & NGOs. Generally, its scope is quite relevant and to the point for the generalist and expert in the filed as it embraces, strategy, talent management, HR governance, risk compliance, analytics and measurement.*

5.6.1.2 Critique

Leading from the discussion above, the competencies required for employability and career success are self-dedication and passion for the work one does. Figure 5.5 below illustrates the themes which emerged. Jane believed that adding this to the model is essential as these are personal resources which one requires as senior HR practitioners are facing numerous

legitimacy challenges in organisations and thus passion and dedication ensure that one never gives up growing the HR agenda in the workplace. As a competency, these arguably fall under soft skills as they cannot be taught but are inherent in an individual.

The themes which emerged from the critique of the model were that the model is too academic; the model lacks personal characteristics; nothing new here and not all practitioners know about it.

The model is too academic

The SABPP model was viewed as complex especially to those who are new to the profession. The model seems more applicable to those in leadership positions within the profession. There is need for it to be broken down to ensure it is understood by all within the profession.

Gabriel *The 5 capabilities are the ones graduates must focus on. As you start getting higher in the hierarchy it becomes strategy and more complimented. Although I am not sure on the syllabus, graduates at the end must also know and understand the other knowledge areas, so that as they move up the hierarchy items do not become new.*

Graduates must leave university with knowledge at least on the others at the elechon in the hierarchy; otherwise it will take time for them to grow in the workplace. When you move up the hierarchy there will be at least knowledge on strategy and business dynamics. There is a gap, and I believe universities can do more to bridge the gap so that they remain relevant. Most academics lack business knowledge and skills.

Academic is good it teaches you to think and face the challenges out there. The world of work is more complex thus lecturers have a mandate to ensure they keep abreast with the trends. The competency model is a good start, we live in a complex world and complex reality requires complex.

Qebo *On the other hand, for the beginner, it would be difficult to follow of the most items as prescribed. Therefore more guidance substantiated with some examples would be welcomed in this instance to make the dialogue easier for this latter group.*

The model was labelled as too academic as the competencies needed to be broken down. The other reason given was the way in which issues in the workplace are regarded as reactive in solving problems rather than following a prescribed framework. Muhasin criticised the use of one model as being limiting and too restrictive works in – it works for the academia but not for practitioners.

Ludwe *...very relevant but too academic, organisations usually have their own competency model.*

Mark *It needs to be simplified in terms which can be understood by all. Some it does not distinguish between what new people and experienced people must know. Experience has shown me that it's easy to prepare for a profession when one know what they getting into.*

Muhasin *...my contention is one the framing of the competencies. If we subscribe to one model, HR becomes an event rather than a profession. The model is too theoretical Models seems to be relevant to academics, not for practitioners. Each organisation has its own policies and procedures they are the ones which inform how practitioners work.*

The model lacks personal characteristics

Personality, resilience and positive psychology which are essential skills to success and employability are not addressed. These attributes are key as they equip practitioners in facing and dealing with the squabbles which arise as HR is fighting for legitimacy. Passion for the profession was also noted to be lacking.

Sesethu *..personal attributes which are key to employability and career success such as personality and resilience are not highlighted. With the challenges HR is facing and the war to be in the board room table, these attributes ensure us as practitioners keep pushing for our place regardless of the internal politics surrounding the objective.*



Jane *The key aspect missing is self-dedication- passion for the work.*

Nothing new here

Muhasin criticises the SABPP model as it is similar to the Ulrich HR competency model. Craig noted that the model did not add anything new to his practice as the global organisation he worked for had one in place. Siphon viewed the model as reactive instead of proactive to the challenges HR is facing. Multinational organisations with their own framework in place were not affected by the introduction of the model. Some organisations have an internal model which speaks to their needs. From an HR perspective, the model is sound but some do not necessarily abide to it as it is overridden by the internal models. The model is drawn from other competency models, among them that of Dave Ulrich. It is viewed as it is being imposed on South Africa when its applicability is yet to be tested. The model is also viewed as being reactive rather than proactive as it came out to address challenges which were raised about HR. The current climate of high youth unemployment seems to be ignored as the model does not guide HR on the steps to take. Models must provide access to the workplace and thus the competency model must have a door as access to the workplace

Muhasin ...it looks like the Ulrich model thus it is taking something from Europe and its being adopted in the South African context. But on the other hand it's a adds to HR being respected in the workplace, practitioners have something to fall on.

Craig The introduction of the SABPP competency model did not affect the way I do work as I work for a global organisation we have an internal model which is expected to apply to all different functions of the organisation. The internal model applies to internal competency model. I know about the model but hardly put them in place. From a focused HR point of view the model is quite good.

Sipho ...in my view the SABPP competency model is not bringing anything new to the table. It offers solutions to the already exiting problems/ challenges. It is I believe that the two should be integrated. The main challenge of the country will be catastrophic is the youth unemployment rate which is the future human capital of this country, in developing HR competency models we should also acknowledge that as HR practitioners within the HR landscape we have a responsibility to come up with innovative solutions or strategies that will combat the possible catastrophe.

Until we acknowledge that it is our competency model to provide access to the work place, that's when we can be able to conduct a diagnostic assessment of what is not working to the current practices and provide solutions to address current state of affairs and prevent this possible catastrophic event.

We need to shift away from the practice of reviewing current policies, we need to put them aside and start developing new ones. It is clear that something is not working, when we review a policy that was developed in 1985, by implication, we are guided by the ideology of that particular era.

Our human capital is not what only our organisations is, but, what we would one day need for the success and sustainability of our organisation and we have a responsibility towards that, hence, it would be our competency. In this SABPP HR competency Model, we should have a door which is access.

Not all practitioners know it

For HR to speak with one voice, the SABPP model must be implemented within respective organisations However, Babalwa and Thomas identified that the model is relatively unknown to other HR circles. Some practitioners are not aware of the competencies which can enable them to succeed.

Babalwa ...it does contain all essential HR competencies necessary for a successful career in HR but it is still relatively unknown in other spheres. So they need to communicate to other organisations.

Thomas ...it does address the essential HR competencies but they need to ensure that all HR practitioners are aware of the requirements for them to succeed in HR.

The practitioners' direct criticism of the models was that it is too academic and generic as in most cases each organisation has or makes its own competency model which talks to its needs. The descriptions used in the categorisation of the competencies were 'broad' and 'needs to be simplified'. The model does not categorise what one must know at each level. This is so as Mark contended that it is easier to prepare for a profession when one has a clear idea of where one is going.

The SABPP model contains competencies which are essential to HR practitioners in South Africa. The model is relatively unknown to some practitioners. The professional body needs to communicate more to organisations so that they get buy-in from other practitioners as the models will help them in their quest to professionalisation and to the boardroom. The competency model significantly addresses the competency needs in South Africa; however, not all practitioners are aware of the SABPP. In order for it to be useful, most if not all practitioners must make use of it so that they succeed.

Currently, there is uncertainty whether the syllabus for HR at undergraduate level covers all five capabilities and the four pillars. At entry level, one must master the five core competencies and the other become relevant within at least two to five years as one begins to progress. Although the model seems complex, it is essential to note that complex ideas need complex solutions. The mandate of producing competent graduates rests on universities and they must work with relevant stakeholders to produce quality graduates. However, there seems to be a gap. The competencies are co-dependent, being stronger in one does not mean you must ignore the other. They complement each other.

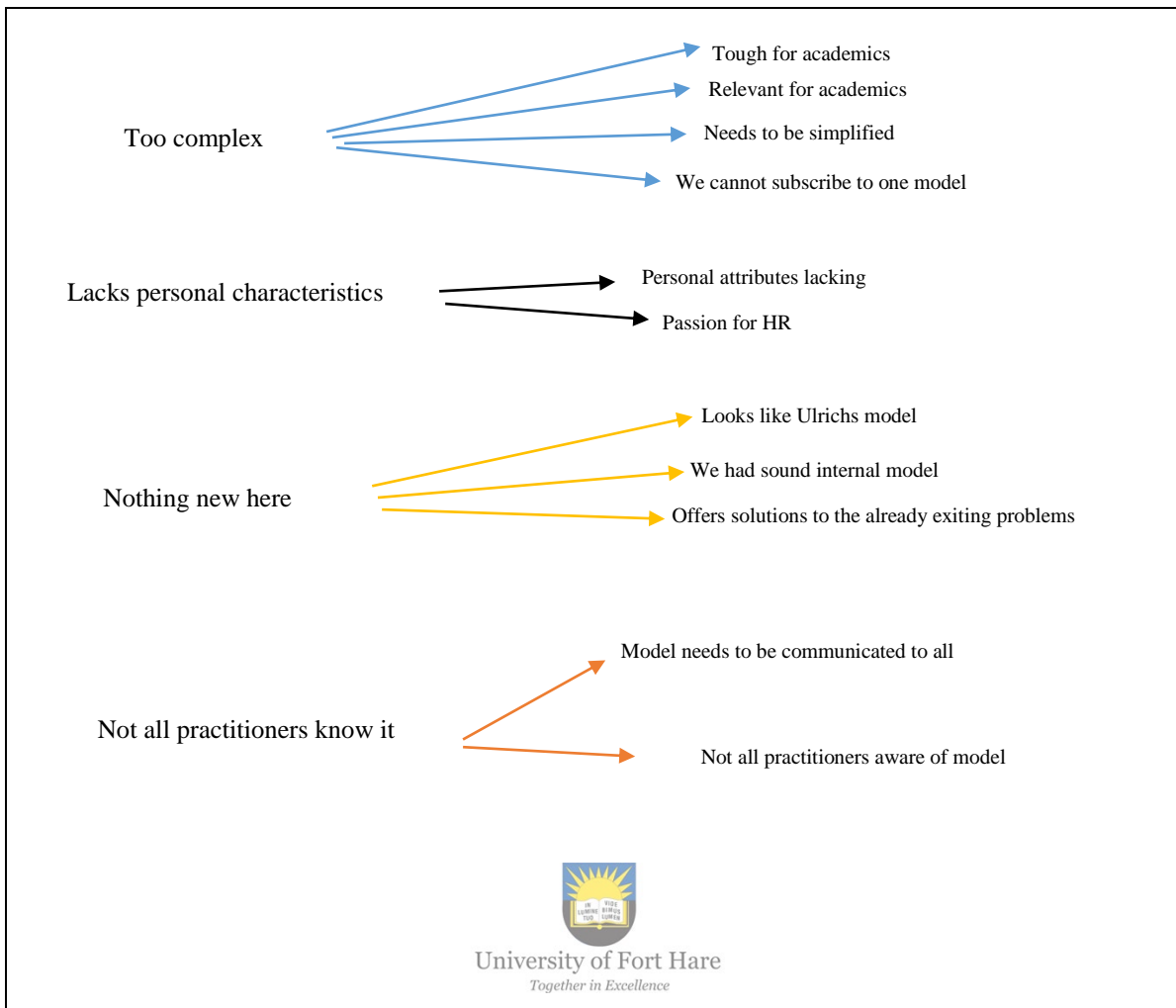


Figure 5.5: Critic to SABPP competency model

5.6.2 Aspects of the model practitioners would change to improve the workplace environment

Participants' input regarding the SABPP model was requested as they had to identify aspects which they felt required change to make the model efficient so as to enhance their workplace. In identifying these areas, some felt putting essential areas as being core. HR governance risk and compliance are areas which need emphasis as for most practitioners they are areas of going concern.

A diversity strategy is crucial in the current climate due to pressures to redress the imbalances of the past. Included in diversity is religion, culture and sexual orientation. A people strategy to cater for employee HR needs could include shared service centres. The challenge comes to HR risk and governance, this is a going concern and there are very few risks which are HR related. There is also the need for tools which can measure the prescribed competencies such as duty to society. Emphasis must be on the capabilities for HR to be more effective.

Craig ...all the competencies are represented in my organisation as our model is set for this organisation. HR strategy is aligned to the broader strategy of the organisation. We have a people strategy which covers most HR essentials. It is still a challenge to influence strategy as some of our organisations have international models, we have shared service centres, and some of the components of the models are Ability to influence strategy at large. There are items in the global strategy that we wish to change but HR influence is limited. The other areas are covered well. Governance risk and compliance has been a challenge and we are in the process of going concern. We lack in risk management as there are less risks associated with HR. We have a diversity strategy especially on race and gender, but we also include culture, religion, and sexual orientation. We do targeted recruitment and there is a strict assessment criterion.

Muhasin Duty to society- tools used in the recruitment process do not measure most of the cited competencies. The mandate of transformation in the South African context is usually left to the state.

Qebo ...all aspects are important, however, there need to place more emphasis on the following strategy, HR service delivery, HR governance and risk, compliance, to ensure that performance standards are improved and comparable to best practice.

Analytic and measurement despite the fact that there are several models pursued by different institutions, use of few examples here in leading the way for creation of authentic and reliable record data. HR and business knowledge to ensure that HR goals objectives are fully aligned to business practice goals. Ethics and professionalism, if proper ethical and professional measures are in place, it will help limit and curb corrupt practice.

In reorganising the model, HR service delivery is placed after strategy when looking at the capabilities of HR. The use of external consultants to draft talent frameworks in some organisations then creates gaps. Policies of HR need to be reviewed often so that they talk to the needs of their organisations. There must be emphasis on customer service and the emphasis must be stated explicitly.

Noluthando I would put HR Service Delivery immediately after strategy, when it comes to the HR capabilities. From previous experience, I have seen how HR can have the best Talent Management practices and structures in place, but the delivery of the service is left wanting. An outsourced consultant can draft a Talent Management framework, but internal HR is still accountable for service delivery. Many a times when my previous employer was evaluating using the customer service index (CSI), HR would come out last. Various reasons were given by the HR Leadership, including the fact that some of the evaluators may be unhappy with certain policies of HR. However I am still of the opinion that the service delivery was a big factor.

Zubeida ...perhaps customers focus needs to be more explicit. Ultimately from a strategy perspective all business across industry focuses on serving in one way or the other. At a glance the model-this does not come through. You have to go through the detail.

Craig A review of the model is also due as there has been enough time since its introduction.

The constructs in the model need to be broken down to inform practitioners at which stage they must know them. The terms in the model need to be redefined as there are some semantic challenges and meaning must not be lost. HR is there to serve the people, supervise work management and control the allocation of resources. Practitioners understand that words have to be reduced or simplified for the model as there is a need for an expanded version for layman. The fact must never be ignored that some senior HR people occupy their positions not because they studied HR but because they were ‘dumped’ there.

Sesethu ...it needs to break down on which levels one must know.

Craig they must redefine some terms to avoid semantic challenges.

Adding the business partner role must be added as a pillar as it talks to the core functions of an organisation and is what HR is striving to do. Finance is also an area of weaknesses where most HR personnel must be included – not the advanced finance but the basic.



Sipho ...what I would change is the fifth pillar to be HR business partnering. HR as a support function has responsibilities of ensuring that the core business of the organisation is delivering the mandate. There should be a paradigm shift from the transactional HR (which is the current practice in most organisations) to partnering with the core business in order to provide adequate support and improve the workplace environment.

Gabriel You can't use a simple thing to explain complex stuff. Talent management involves succession planning. Its in a hut as you can find a home for the complexity in the model. The competencies are co-dependent. They work better HR needs to learn the language of business. Graduates must understand finance so as to understand.

To enhance effectiveness of the competency model, participants were requested to identify constructs they would add to the model to improve their workplace. Passion for HR and what one does was stated as a key motivating factor which does more in cementing the role of HR.

Jane ...focuses on the passion for the work will lead to greater role models to shape the future of HR in the workplace. Affording HR a seat on the boardroom table will be great.

Practitioners were content with the state of the model. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the competency model would be appreciated. Rigorous communication by the professional body is required so as to advance the HR cause. Succession planning and grooming future leaders of tomorrow also needs to be incorporated.

Ann *I studied the model intensively and find it very comprehensive and relevant.*

Siphokazi *...training and more rigorous communications by the professional body to make more members aware on the advancement of HR.*

Moses *At this point in time I would not change any aspects however rather assess the effectiveness of the competencies and then make changes where necessary.*

Stephen *Leadership competency includes the development of people and of young leaders in the organisation which I regard as critically essential.*

Although culture can be organisation specific, there is need for the model to cater for hard work as the environment is challenging. Aligning the organisation culture to working hard and impacting the supporting departments makes organisations more effective.

Mark *...create a culture of hard working people that understand what they do will be what is left behind for their own kinds.*

Boly *There are no aspects to change as the public service will be adjusting theirs to suit this one.*



5.6.3 Impact of the introduction of the SABB model to HR practice

Professional body models serve as a prototype to members and non-members in the specific profession and can be used as a standard framework for competencies. Figure 5.6 below identifies the themes which emerged as practitioners shared the perceived impact of the SABPP competency model in their respective organisations. When a model is introduced it must have an impact on practice if new. In the case of the SABPP competency model, some practitioners already had sound frameworks in place for HR practice within their organisations. The SABPP model introduction supplemented what they were doing already, and in some instances the model was seen as crucial for HR in South Africa.

Some organisation practitioners are still working along the traditional HR lines especially in government departments. Some leaders are sceptical about change and new things and prefer maintaining the status quo and some leaders do not have an HR background. This notion was cemented by Charisa who preferred to work along the traditional line and preferred not and never to move to strategy as she was afraid she would forget the mandate for HR which is to serve people. In some public sector organisations it is still work in progress as the SABPP

competency model has yet to be implemented, although it is in the pipeline. This sentiment was shared by practitioners from the public sector departments. Having a leader who lacks sound HR exposure makes it more challenging to get buy-in on the developments of HR.

The SABPP competency model introduced in 2012 is not new but a refinement of the old model. Thus other practitioners were already making use of the competency models. Some organisations were already making use of the competencies and had an internal model. The identified themes were as follows: *HR is not yet strategic; We had our own model; Model not yet adopted; Work in progress; Model has worked for my career progression and organisation; Model made organisation more efficient and HR more strategic* – as shown in Figure 5.6 below.

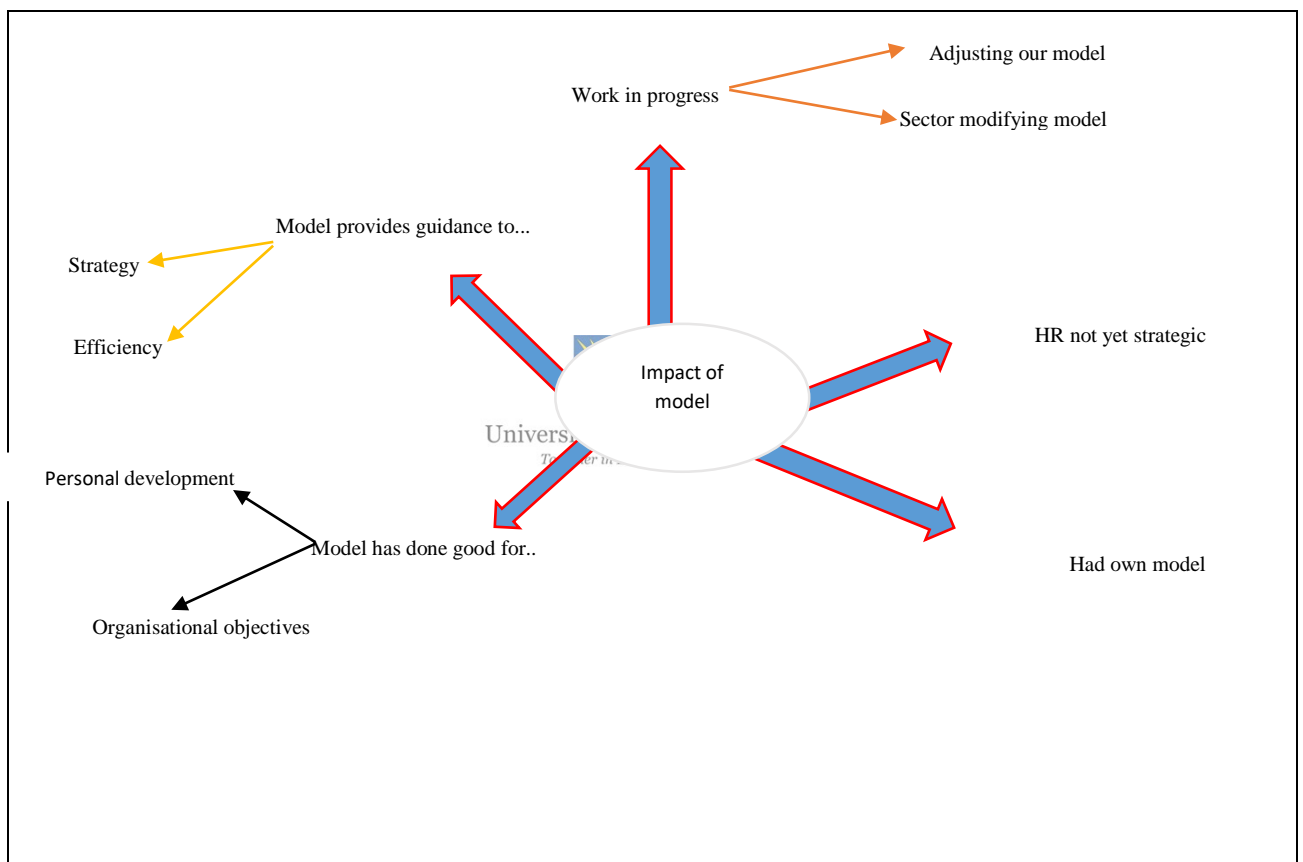


Figure 5.6: Impact of SABPP competency model after introduction

HR is not yet strategic

The SABPP competency model did not immediately impact practice as alluded to by Zubeida, who said that their organisation had not yet adopted a strategic orientation. Jane stated that in her organisation HR was focused on the traditional orientation. This was similar to Sesethus’ organisation.

Zubeida ...the group executive has limited exposure and experience with HR. The focus is not strategic as yet, thus standards and competencies are not standard business practice.

Charisa At the level which I am at now there is a lot of interaction, I am afraid of moving to strategy as in most cases one forgets. Most HR managers have lost touch with the needs of the basic mandate of HR as they become strategic. I love HR operations which is why I do not want to move from the position I occupy. I am not yet ready to be an executive. I prefer an advisory role rather than a managerial role.

Jane ...at the current organisation – directions + managers still work according to old work practices and do not understand the valuable function HR plays for the future of an organisation.

Sesethu ...the type of organisation keeps traditional HR functions. We are not usually involved in the process of setting strategic goals.

We had our own model

The SABPP competency model introduced in 2012 is not new but a refinement of the old model. Thus other practitioners were already making use of the competency models. Some organisations were already making use of the competencies and had an internal model. Moses also emphasised that the 2012 model was not new as their organisation had a competency model aligned to the previous generic model.



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Sipho ...not really as we have not yet seen a need to align our HR model to the SABPP HR competence model, what have talks to what we do.

Moses I have been using most of these competencies prior to the introduction of this model. It must be remembered the SABPP developed a Generic Competency Model for HR Practitioners in 1990! The above model is a refinement of previous work in this regard.

Model not yet adopted

Although the SABPP competency model was there, some organisations had not yet made use of the competency model. This was shared by Babalwa, whose organisation was yet to implement the competency model.

Babalwa ...it has not yet been adopted in my organisation but I am aware of it...

Work in progress

When the SABPP competency model was introduced, public sector organisations realigned their frameworks to ensure it suits the direction HR is taking. The organisations of Unathi, Zizipho and Mark were adjusting their models to the one introduced by the professional body.

Unathi ...the public sector has its own HR competency framework but it can be realigned to the SABPP.

Zizipho ...my organisation is busy adjusting to one which suits its needs.

Mark ...due to nature of our organisation we were practicing what the model preaches and we are ensuring it talks to our organisation.

Model has contributed to my career progression and organisation

The introduction of the SABPP competency model came with its own merits. It made practitioners review their perspective of their profession. The introduction of the model opened other avenues and platforms for growth. The competency model introduction instilled a great sense of confidence in Qebo. Muhasin added that the model gave practitioners a voice to speak with in the quest for professionalisation and a boardroom seat. Practitioners were able to network during and after the development of the model as they strove for HR to speak with one voice.

The competency model made practitioners have a holistic view of HR. Practitioners such as Athenkosi used the model for their career development as they found areas of improvement in their own competencies. The SABPP competency model gives one greater insight into HR and is a sound foundation for HR to be a strategic role player in organisations.



Qebo It heightens motivation to render the best professional practice in your area to help boost your professional body as exemplary. To crown it all is that one is not alone in grappling with unknown frameworks models or standards, in other words, help could be solicited at any given moment in the case of problems. Call it added confidence gained by the member on the part of facing problems by belonging to a professional body.

Ann I am often invited as an HR speaker, for conducting HR audits and I lecturer at a business school in HR modules .

Peter ...in a way yes, it gave me a broader perspective of the HR fraternity.

Athenkosi Yes it indicated areas to me which I needed to improve on in my career.

Susan Yes made me think more holistically on HR issues.

Noluthando Yes it did. It gave me the realization that ethics are a critical pillar of HR, and it is not a fluid quality that certain HR professionals possess, but actually a foundation for all we do as HR professionals.

Model made organisation more efficient and HR more strategic

The greatest challenge, however, is getting the personnel to carry out the mandate HR must abide by. Smaller organisations also face the challenge of not being able to employ skilled personnel due to the lack of resources to finance such initiatives. Having practitioners who are competent to carry out the mandate for HR would do more justice.

Rob ...it provided a guideline to build and improve company policy and procedure.

Mpho ...yes in my organisation we have never adopted the model. The time I joined the organisation it was facing numerous challenges which needed us to work outside the box in order for us to achieve our objectives.

We were led by a person who had a poor HR background and were more of correcting. Be that as May. The model is relevant though in an environment in which HR is recognized and acknowledged. We had a reactive orientation. We're fixing things rather than coming up with new things the organisation culture was compromised, work ethic, and accountability where the core elements we fostered for.

Muhasin Yes, from a general perspective it gave us practitioners a voice, as we seek to professionalize and enter the boardroom there is need for structure. The model made us network as we contributed to its development. It strives for HR to speak with one voice.



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Ludwe ...it has added our voice for HR to be awarded a seat to the boardroom.

Siphokazi ...it enhanced efficiency within the department.

Simon ...yes I used this to start building towards a more cohesive HR department emphasizing collaboration in order for HR to play a more strategic role in achieving company goals.

Nicole It provides a structured and logical framework to ensure the full spectrum of HR service delivery- both from a practitioner as well as the organisations point of view/needs.

The SABPP competency model served as a logical and structured framework toward building HR departments which collaborate and play more strategic roles, thus a solid foundation and a voice. Efficiency is the obvious benefit and opens up views of practitioners of their practice and areas in which they need improvement. Other organisations had a skills audit in place and saw the relevance of the model. Organisations which had HR leaders with no HR background saw the value of the models as it aided them in reacting to the challenges in the workplace It helped the organisation in

recovering as core elements had been compromised such as organisation culture work ethic, and accountability.

Stephen *The challenge however is getting the right people to put the dream of HR into practice, getting critical skills is not easy sometimes impossible as smaller organisations and some do not have the resources to acquire such labour.*

5.6.5 Competencies to be added in model

As shown in Figure 5.7 below, practitioners gave insight into the competencies they think must be added to the SABPP competency model. The human touch, work ethic, love for people, passion for the profession, personality, emotional intelligence, attitude, behavioural competencies, positive psychology and arithmetic numeracy were identified as key items to be added. The human element and human attributes are valuable to understand human behaviour and contexts. Working hard and mastering the soft skills is the general foundation, which must be accompanied by a love for people. Understanding human nature, having a human touch and working with humility, and emotional intelligence must be possessed by practitioners. Basic soft skills and fortitude when ingrained in practitioners equip them to face their day-to-day challenges. Passion for the profession is an area which the SABPP competency model should add; this ensures that those who are in the profession and use it do so diligently for the continued survival of the profession.



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Peter *I regard the human touch or the human element in HR as essential. People are not machines.*

Stephen *...hard work and other basic soft skills, A genuine love for people.*

Sipho *...passion (even though this might not necessarily be a competence. It just may be the reason why we have been failing to move the HR agenda.*

Muhasin and Sesethu identified adding networking to the SABPP competency model as justifiable; this is so as it is crucial in building relations within and outside an organisation. Personality, positive psychology, resilience, behavioural competencies, taking initiative, and the right attitude are also areas practitioners identified as crucial and are not explicitly stated in the model.

Siphokazi *...personality, positive psychology (resilience) leadership.*

Sesethu *...initiative, networking; all in the model including emotional intelligence and personality and positive psychology.*

Ludwe *...attitude, Positive psychology, Behavioural competencies.*

Ann *...interpersonal strength, Specialized HR field.*

Soft skills, numeracy skills, and some knowledge of accounting systems are essential competencies. Ethical leadership and conduct participants from the public sector reinforced the HR traditional roles as essential. Research also helps practitioners to be aware of what is happening around them. It is essential to note that competencies alone do not meet the cut, they need to be complemented by attitude and desire to meet objectives. Arithmetic skills, being a good researcher and knowledge of basic accounting are areas of importance in HR in South Africa and they underpinned with the right attitude.

Qebo ...research, competencies alone do not cut it; they require a certain level of motivation, together with the right attitude to make things work in your organisation. As the result, the right drive pushes the individual to seek new ways of services and products. You end up with new initiatives, that may require some research and innovation and lifelong learning (CPD) which eventually help push up the bar and standards.

Muhasin ...all in the model include networking, report writing, intuition, in a nutshell all the soft skills and for HR more arithmetic a bit of accounting knowledge so as to enable the strategic role.

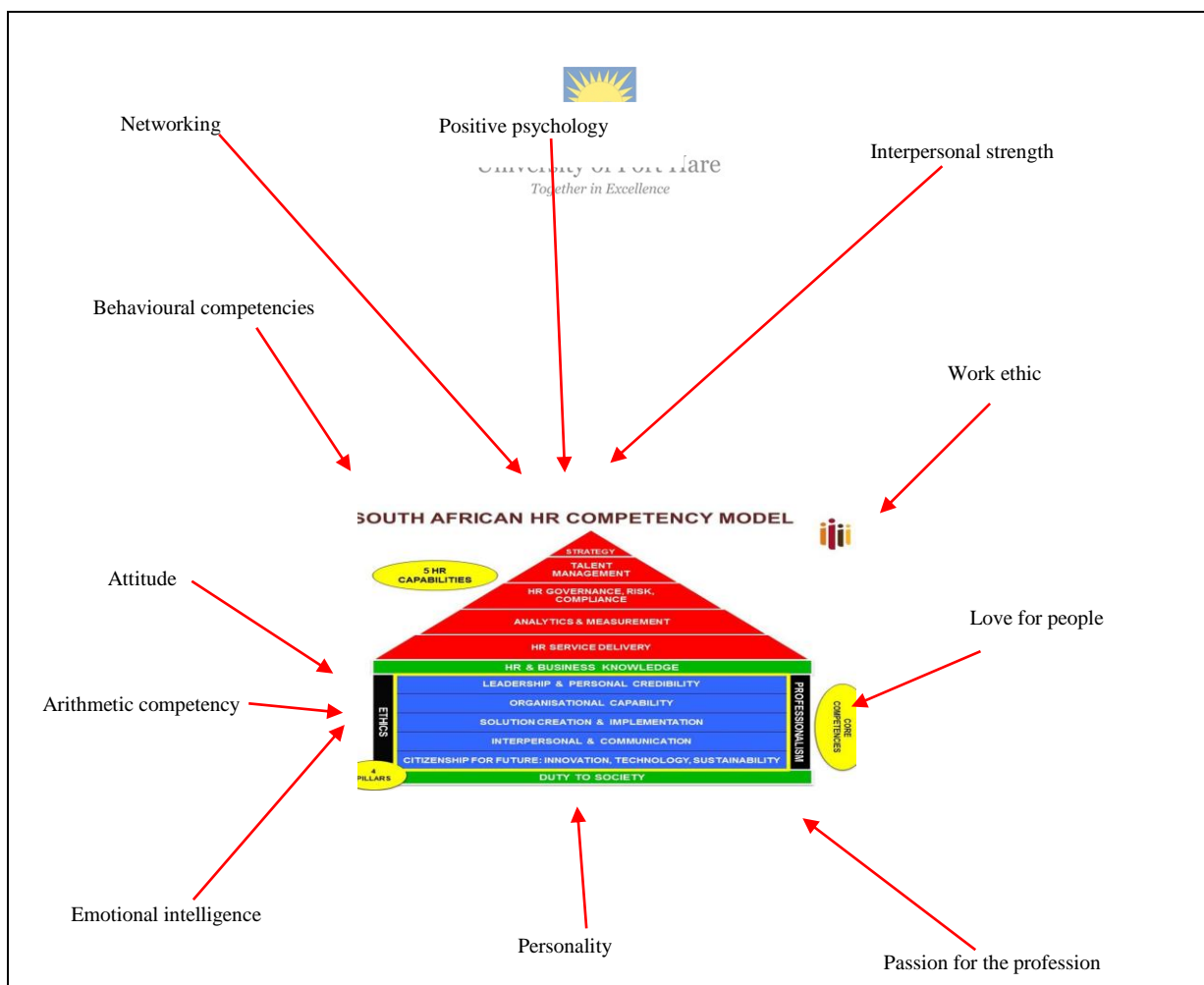


Figure 5.7 Items to add to SABPP competency model

5.6.4 Key competencies for HR in South Africa

Participants also identified the competencies from the SABPP competency model which were fundamental for performance within their respective organisations. In order for HR to get a strong backbone, HR and Business Knowledge, Leadership and Personal credibility were reasoned as crucial. Being sensitive to the culture in a multi-cultural South African context is fundamental for effective performance and to understand the dynamics of the organisation. Working in teams and being able to manage projects are essential competencies. Knowledge of the industry in which practitioners operate, enables them to adapt to what is happening around them.

Business acumen skills, employee advocacy, managing of relationships within the organisation managing change are all vital. These competencies and capabilities found in the SABPP competency model were highlighted as essential by practitioners.

Practitioners identified areas which are fundamental in the day-to-day running of effective HR performance. The areas identified also cement the applicability of the SABPP competency model to the current context and arguably these are the critical HR areas in South Africa.

The identified areas were classified into three categories, namely traditional, modern and behavioural, as shown in Figure 5.8 below. These classifications are also consistent with literature (Johson & King 2002) on HR competencies. However, literature classification is between traditional and modern. The behavioural aspects were added as well as incorporate other competencies which are not classifiable to the three categories.



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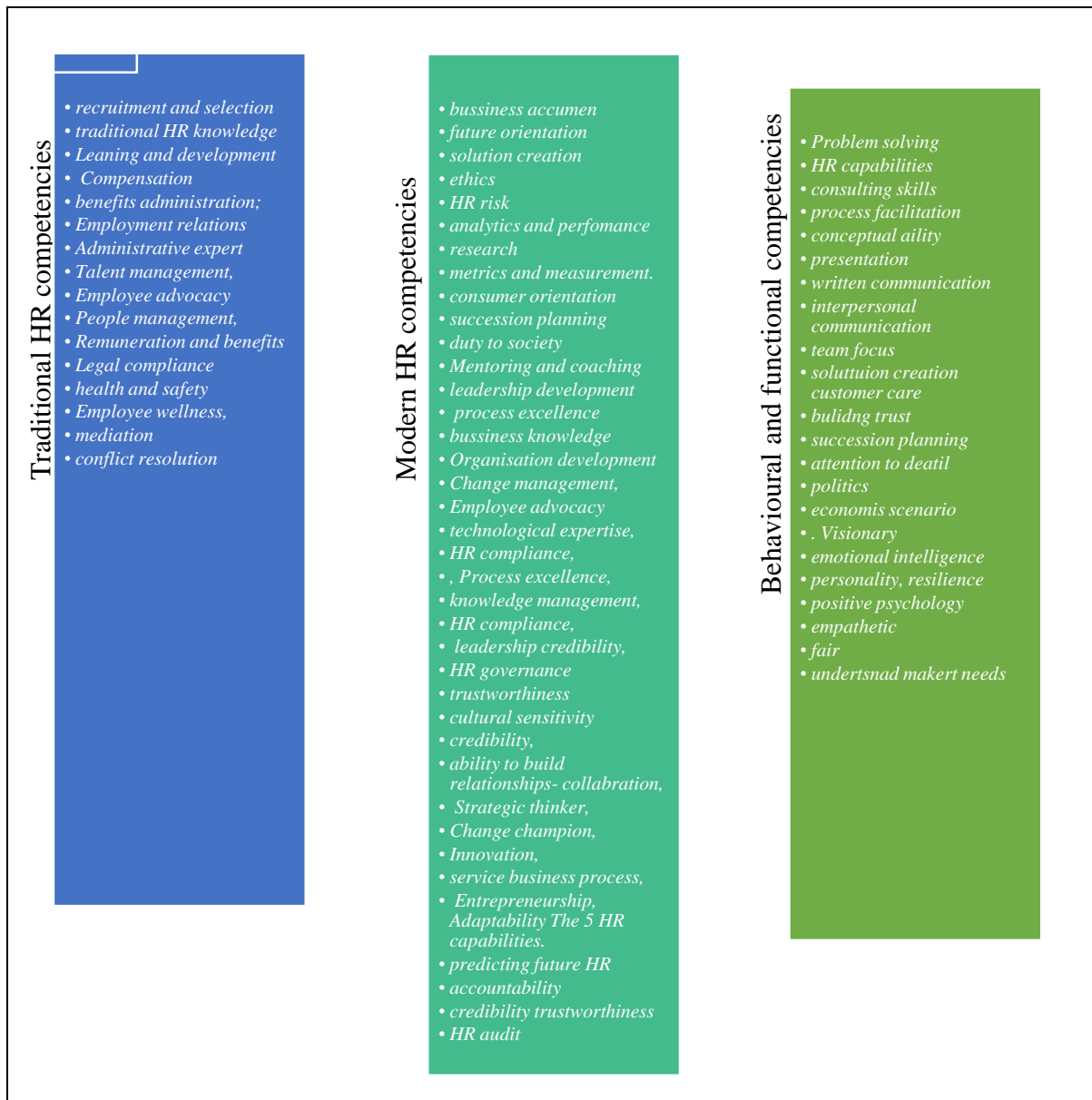


Figure5.8: Key HR competencies

Traditional HR

The traditional competencies which were identified (Boly, Noluthando, Lindelwa, Zizipho, Chan, John, Boly and Mpho) as key to HR were recruitment and selection; learning and development, compensation/remuneration and benefits administration, employment relations, mentoring and coaching, administrative expert, employee advocacy, employment relations, people management, problem solving, basic HR knowledge and capabilities, legal compliance and auditing, organisation development, and employee wellness.

Modern HR

The modern HR competencies identified by practitioners in the study were: technological expertise, HR compliance, coaching and monitoring, employee advocacy, process excellence, knowledge management, leadership credibility, trustworthiness and credibility, ability to build relationships – collaboration, strategic thinker, change champion, innovation, service business

process, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and the five HR capabilities. These must also be aligned/integrated with the HR Standards,

Jane *Understand the role of HR in the workplace.*

Peter *HR and business knowledge. If HR cannot convert their goals to business goals, they become irrelevant.*

Zubeida *...specific industry knowledge either on product, service business process, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability.*

Muhasin *...in South Africa labor market is turbulent and our greatest challenge is equity. Our economy is knowledge driven and we are losing a lot of skills talent management is crucial, Duty to society. Most of our underprivileged communities lack role models. In most contexts duty to society refers to the legal framework and deals with the equity issues, As practitioners it is our responsibility to provide more role models for the underprivileged and help deal with the challenges of the economy.*

Nicole *...subject matter experts, including all legal aspects, Negotiation skills, mediation, conflict resolution, Workforce planning, strategy, business acumen, Building trust, organisational development/culture building and learning and development, Succession planning, leadership development, accelerated learning and diversity deliverables.*

Nicole *...honesty, resisting temptation, / bribes, work responsibly with power, you are the custodian of employees and their careers. Thinking triple bottom line (profit, people, environment).*



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Sipho *...innovation, Responsiveness to change, Communication (verbal written report writing), Uphold high ethical standards, High professionalism, Autonomy, Paying attention to detail.*

Behavioural

The competencies classified under behavioural are the other attributes which are not listed in the SABPP competency model and are generally ignored by most models. These attributes are intangible and are the underlying characteristics of individuals.

Sesethu *...all in the model including emotional intelligence and personality and positive psychology.*

Mpho *...understanding the political and cultural scenario in South Africa.*

Mark *...understand South Africa's policies, Understand organisation needs, Have empathy for employees, Be fair and, Be open to audit and change.*

The competencies included leadership skills and setting the standards of what needs to be done, creating an environment of continuous learning and being willing to learn.

5.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter presented the findings of the study. Themes were used to give meaning to participants' opinions. Themes were derived from the stories of participants. HR practitioners identified the competencies and attributes which are essential to employability and career success within HR. Practitioners also provided constructive criticism of the competency model and its applicability to HR in the South African context. The following chapter discusses the contribution to literature and the findings of the study.

SIMON *Practitioners who do not incorporate these competencies into their own development will be left behind and will not succeed as these competencies speak to the new roles that HR practitioners must play.*



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CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter synthesizes the results from Chapter 5 and offers a conclusion to the thesis. The chapter first reflects on the methodology adopted, discusses the main findings of the study, and then highlights the researcher's contribution to knowledge.

6.2 THESIS SUMMARY

The study was an exploration into HR competencies, employability and career success in South Africa. The thesis was a reflection on the careers of senior HR personnel registered with the SABPP as master or chartered HR practitioners. The study identified the HR competencies in South Africa which are attributed to employability and subsequently career success. The study also assessed the applicability of the SABPP competency model to the HR practice in South Africa. The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 was the introduction and identifies the major theories grounding the study; the chapter also gave an overview of the study contents.

Chapter 2 focused on HR competencies; the chapter commenced by providing a background for HR and definitions of competencies, discussed competency models and the traditional and modern HR competencies. Chapter 3 dealt with the concept of employability and career success respectively. The concept of employability was discussed from the developed world perspective and developing nations. Models of employability were discussed. The researcher sought to highlight the paucity of literature regarding sector-specific employability. Theories and factors influencing career success were identified. In line with the definitions of employability as part of lifelong learning, the researcher also observed that those who embrace this definition enhance their chances of leadership and have greater prospects of growth. Learning starts in the workplace as from employability one is expected to apply what one has learnt not immediately after getting a job. Chapter 4 presented the methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter 5 presented the findings of the study. This current chapter, Chapter 6, is a discussion the findings of the study. This chapter provides a brief summary of the thesis, Chapter 7 discusses the managerial implications and suggests the areas for future research. In Chapter 8 the researcher reflects on the study and his experiences.

6.3 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are discussed along with the study variables, which are employability, career success and HR competencies.

6.3.1 Employability

- *The study identified factors which contribute to one being unemployable*

The stumbling blocks to employability were: getting below 65% in one's major subjects, lack of work experience, unrealistic expectations of the world of work (culture shock), lack of adequate qualification, fewer job opportunities, and an environment flooded with people with a similar qualification.

- *The researcher identified the generic employability traits*

The traits which make one employable identified in the study were: easy access to job market, extra curriculum activities, resilience, research on skills required by employers, right qualification, recruitment agencies, creativity, willingness to learn, further education, attitude, work ethic, equity legislation, personal attributes, work readiness, passion for the job/ profession, emotional intelligence, personality, positive psychology, critical thinking, emotional maturity, behavioural competencies, recommendations, networking, practical work experience, volunteering, internship.



- *HR competencies were identified for employability and career success*

These competencies were grouped into two clusters, the first being behavioural competencies and then the technical competencies. Vocational work experience, personality, learning from mistakes, practical work experience and internships, equity legislation, people person, networking, emotional intelligence, being a fast thinker, recommendation (from social networks), behavioural competencies, put theory in practice, easy access to job market, critical thinking, sound oral communication, extra curriculum activities, emotional maturity, willingness to learn, resilience, initiative, positive attitude, research on employability skills, problem solving, work ethic, right qualification, attention to detail, sound verbal communication, recruitment agencies, quality oriented and creativity were all identified as behavioural competencies.

The technical competencies were: HR administration, measurement of performance, technology, keeping abreast with HR trends, master all soft skills, citizen for the future, knowledge of the labour legal framework, negotiator, basic finance skills, knowledge of the

business one works for understanding organisation needs, research, trustworthy, project management, customer care, critical thinking, job content knowledge, recruitment and selection, cultural sensitivity, confidentiality, learning and development, ability to implement change, strategy (build, conceive and implement), remuneration and benefits administration, advanced communication skills, talent management, mentoring and coaching, relationship management, HR governance, employee wellness, dispute resolution, HR risk, employee relations, team builder, HR compliance, compliance, planning and organising, analytics and measurement, interpret policies, decision taker, HR and business knowledge, interpersonal and communication, eye for talent, ethics, innovation, solution creation and implementation, personal credibility, duty to society, leadership, organisation credibility, HR service delivery and business acumen.

6.3.2 Career success

- ***Satisfaction with current position they occupy***

Practitioners were generally satisfied with the portfolios they occupied. Their sense of satisfaction was as a result of recognition and rewards for their duties. However, dissatisfaction with the position was due to their lack of recognition of their inputs, affirmative action, and the lack of growth prospects among other reasons. Mobility (moving to greener pastures), due to the paucity of numerous senior positions within a single firm enhanced inter-organisational mobility.

- ***Satisfaction with salary***

Participants with expatriate experience highlighted that the salary scales in South Africa were relatively lower compared to abroad. They took a salary cut to ‘work at home’. For most practitioners, income was relatively market related, despite their earnings being eroded by the rand’s volatility. The size of the organisation is a factor which also influenced salary scale.

- ***Career progression and promotion***

Although prospects of growth were dependent on availability of positions, respondents were generally satisfied with their vertical mobility. Affirmative action, organisations with flat structures, and lack of career-pathing restricted career progression.

- ***Competencies that attributed to career success***

The study identified skills practitioners attributed as key to career success in South Africa: Knowledge and skills and how to apply these in the work context; Decision making;

Accountability, business knowledge; Political consciousness; Risk assessment and compliance; change agent; Professional conduct, HRIS, payroll; People skills; People management; arithmetic literacy , customer care; Legal compliance, cultural sensitivity Productivity, resource management; Competency modelling; Project management; Administrative skills; highly ethical; Traditional HR competencies, Leadership; Training needs analysis; Teamwork; (verbally and written); Job evaluation; resource management; Strategic influence; Managing teams; psychological contract balance; Business partner; being entrepreneurial; Work independently; Personality must suit the occupation one want, marketability, were identified as career success progress.

- ***Meaning of career success***

In the study, the meaning of career success was ascertained as recognition and making a strategic contribution. The lack of appreciation is central to dissatisfaction. The meaning of career success was a derivative from the experiences and expectations of practitioners.

6.3.3 HR competencies

- ***SABPP Competency model addressing essential HR competencies***

The competency model does address the competencies for HR in South Africa. However, in order to reap benefits, it must be adopted and implemented in an organisation. The SABPP model is not known by all practitioners in South Africa; the SABPP competency model does not include individual characteristics critical to performance and some viewed it as too academic.

- ***Sections of the SABPP competency model participants would change***

Practitioners were content with the model; however, the issue of semantics was identified as problematic. The SABPP competency model also needs to be broken down so that it can be understood by all in the profession and those that will enter the profession. Passion for the profession along with personal attributes were identified as the missing critical characteristics which would make the model more ideal to the profession. A review of the SABPP competency model would be welcomed.

- ***Impact of introducing the SABPP competency model to practitioners' practices in South Africa.***

Certain practitioners already had a sound framework guiding HR practices within their organisations. When the SABPP model was introduced it became instrumental in cementing

the HR voice in the boardroom, as well as the journey for the professionalisation of HR as standards were not consistent with business practice. This is so as other practitioners were aware and had made use of the previous model; those who bought into the competency were ready to adopt the SABPP competency model agreed on its merits. The SABPP competency model was also helpful to organisations which did not have one in place. Then the model's applicability to new job entrance was raised due to the semantics identified.

- ***Key competencies of the SABPP competency model for HR professionals in organisations to execute their duties effectively***

The five capabilities in the competency model were cemented by the four pillars, namely strategy credibility, HR and business knowledge, leadership and personal credibility, and being sensitive to the culture in a multi-cultural South African context. Traditional competencies were identified to be areas of priority in HR.

- ***Key attributes and competencies practitioners regard as essential not addressed in the SABPP competency model***

Personal attributes, resilience, positive psychology, entrepreneurial orientation, cultural sensitivity, business acumen skills, sector specific knowledge, emotional intelligence were among the key attributes identified.



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6.3.4 Preliminary reflection on the findings

Employability and career success go beyond a set of competencies. However, HR competencies set as a framework which one must have embedded if one who wants to pursue a career in HR. The value of an HR degree to the HR profession is key for universities which are the platform through which the competencies can be acquired. There is a general failure to differentiate or separate competencies from personal attributes as they are dependent on each other.

6.4 DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

The study sought to position competencies as fundamental for entry within the HR profession. Findings of the study suggest that for organisations to attain their competitive advantage will depend on their human capital, and intangible assets such as core competencies and sector-specific knowledge (Lawler, 2005). This mandate is solely for the HR departments, and in order for the mandate to be met, HR must be in order. However, globally, the HR function is constantly under fire and in crisis as practitioners are constantly trying to justify themselves.

The bar for HRM has been raised (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009). This is as the function's role is at crossroads (Kochanski & Ruse, 1996) as it seeks to incorporate the new and old HR. From the findings, the adoption of a competency-based approach easily justifies the ascendancy of HR to the boardroom. The competency model works as a backbone for HR to be a sound profession.

6.4.1 Measures which made one employable

Study findings concur with literature on the need for sector-specific skills for employability within HR. As highlighted in literature, graduates in engineering (Belagodu, 2013; Chavez *et al.*, 2016; Rugarcia *et al.*, 2000; Saputra, 2014); accounting (Altarawneh, 2016; Jones, 2010; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Bunney & Therry, 2010); science (Sarkar *et al.*, 2016; Tymon & Batistic, 2016; Pinto, & Ramalheira, 2017); business (Clarke, 2017); and chemical engineering (Fletcher *et al.*, 2016) all require a set of specific skills and knowledge in order to enter the professions. From practitioner opinions, HR is driving towards being a profession, and thus HR can no longer be a dumping zone for failed other professionals, but must now be regarded a profession. For new entrance, an HR qualification is the ticket to enter the profession. Like other professions, generic employability skills are key for employability within HR. The study strongly supports the role of HR qualifications as they equip one with the core competencies required within the profession.



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Although previous studies have been able to identify the generic employability skills (Abas-Mastura *et al.*, 2013; Andrews, & Higson, 2008; Giannantonio & Hurley, 2002; Henrich, 2016; Quek, 2005; Pérez & Cubero, 2014), there seems to be no consensus on the key employability skills and the justifications of reducing skills especially for those seeking to join the profession. There is consensus from literature, not only in South Africa but also globally, on how new graduates fail to display employability skills.

In the study, practitioners perceived soft skills to weigh more in the recruitment of HR job entrance. However, soft skills were not only key to employability but also for career success. Justification for this can be found from de Guzman and Choi (2013) who referred to them as key skills, core skills, life skills, essential skills, key competencies, and generic skills. The majority of the study participants gave evidence of the merits of soft skills to enhancing employability and career success. This study first identified the skills, then knowledge and the personal attributes which are key in HR. The soft skills identified in the study are specific to HR in South Africa.

Findings of the study identified employability skills to include communication, teamwork, problem solving, self-management, planning and organising, technology, life-long learning, and enterprise skills which are compatible with the work of Dacre et al. (2013), de Guzman, and Choi (2013: 200); precision consultancy (Yassin *et al.*, 2008); initiative and enterprise (Lowden *et al.*, 2011); (UKCES, 2009), willingness to learn (Salleh *et al.*, 2010) as well as using numbers effectively, effective use of language, teamwork, and understanding business. In addition there is proficiency in English, risk-taking skills and time management (Singh & Singh, 2009); goal-directed behaviour, ethical and responsible behaviour, analytical thinking skills, enterprising skills (Coetzee, 2012); and personal qualities and entrepreneurship (Rasul *et al.*, 2013).

The study found internship and work readiness skills key as they aid one in meeting the job demands of employability and career success. This finding is in agreement with Andrews and Higson (2008), Fakhro (2017), He, Gu, et al. (2016), Maynard (2003), Gault et al. (2000), and Shoenfelt, Stone and Kottke (2013). Participants Chan, Noluthando, Siphe, Zubeida and Babalwa shared this sentiment.

A cause for concern identified is the lack of consistency from literature in the definition of employability skills which is characterised by semantics. Unlike Hansen (2002) and Spill (2002), findings from the study only list communication skills and rather than going deeper to clarify this skill by differentiating between oral presentation, written communication, the ability to develop and sustain a logical argument and defend that argument in a reasonable manner by active listening, and communicate effectively in difficult situations. Practitioners only identified that written and oral communication are both key for HR.

Competence in communication is key a sentiment shared by Martín, (2014). In South Africa, where there are more than 10 official languages, language is key as most occupations require incumbents who can speak more than two languages and relate to diverse cultures. Potgieter (2012) identified the lack of empirical studies to this effect. Cultural sensitivity is key in South Africa not only because of the many official languages but the influx (Horn, 2006) of migrants also increases diversity in the workplace. In the study, consistent with literature, employability skills seem to be lacking in the current graduates (Minten & Forsyth, 2014; Rasul, *et al.*, 2013; Green Paper, 2012).

The study determined that age enhances employability as with age comes experience and entrepreneurial orientation; many practitioners are more likely to start their own enterprise after

retirement. Literature too identified age (Van Rooy, Alonso & Viswesvaran 2005; Blanco, 2014; Tisch, 2014; De Armon *et al.*, 2006; and Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006) and education, work experience and training, job performance and organisation tenure as factors which influence employability.

Moving to sector specific employability, the study remedies the gap in South Africa on HR employability. The main focus was to identify and understand employability within HR by identifying the essential traits. Ethics, leadership and understanding cultural diversity, are among the essential employability traits. As we are moving towards sector specific employability, a holistic orientation is required; rather than a positivistic orientation which tends to remove some variables which are important in identifying meaning. The use of a qualitative orientation also suggests the need to move away from mere identification of the essential competencies. Further, it also useful to obtain meaning from the experiences of those that have walked the path, and those who are to walk the path of employability. In so doing, this adds to the adoption of generic and detailed frameworks rather than a simplified one. This is especially the case of South Africa in which job seekers are criticised for applying for jobs which do not speak to their respective occupations. This is in harmony with the works of Griesel and Parkery (2009); Litheko, (2013); Hodges and Burchell, (2003); Potgieter and Coetzee, (2013) and Quek, (2005).



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When used as an educational strategy, emotional intelligence enhances employability and emotional skills in the labour activity. Findings are constant with Navas (2014). In adopting the findings of the study, one must note that being employable does not necessarily mean you get a job due to factors like congestion of the market which are the realities of knowledge-driven economies and there is little control by the state over this (Brown *et al.*, 2003).

The study found that employability is dependent on employees' attitudes and how they use attitude as an asset to market themselves to the employer. This finding cements the work of Sok et al. (2013). The study identified transferable skills as important, which agrees with Fletcher et al. (2016) also found transferable skills as important. Teamwork, information technology, planning and organising, flexibility, adaptability, hardworking, commitment and dedication were also identified by practitioners and this is consistent to (Tymon, 2013; 852). Inquiry/research (Sipho, Athenkosi, Qebo) critical thinking (Rob, Mpho & Moses), creative problem-solving and teamwork are the generic employability skills (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2015). Alumni with more experience were more concerned with business-related skills such as project

management methods, management skills and business-orientated thinking (Fletcher et al 2016). In South Africa, there is little focus on the transferable skills. In the study, the majority of the participants emphasised the value of transferable skills in their merits for employability and career success.

Pegg (2012) and the Precision consultancy (2007) maintained that those who demonstrate entrepreneurship, innovation, and risk taking are more employable. The study identified entrepreneurship and innovation as key attributes, not only for the short term but for long-term employability. Literature (Guerrero *et al.*, 2014; Govender, 2008; Guerrero *et al.*, 2014) urges graduates to be entrepreneurial, and in the study it was observed that being entrepreneurial makes one relevant even when retirement is reached. This was evident as some of the employees who had been retrenched were able to start their own organisations. The study thus identified that being entrepreneurial is fundamental in employability and career success. This adds to the common narrative as universities are being urged to teach graduates to be entrepreneurial. This will enable them to keep up with the market requirements and sustain themselves (Horn, 2006; Potgieter, 2012).

Insufficient attention has been given to remedy the foundation of the HR profession; this is evident from the literature which focuses on the new HR roles and focuses on senior executives. There is need for studies to justify the ascendancy of HR by ensuring both the supply and the strategic elements are in harmony. This in turn will create a solid foundation for those willing to join the profession.

From the themes which emerged in the study, attitude and personal characteristics are critical elements to employability. Coetzee (2008) identified behavioural adaptability, identity awareness, sense of purpose, self-esteem and emotional intelligence as career meta-competencies which enable learners and proactive agents in the management of their careers. In this study, Craig and Mpho confirmed this assertion as these intangibles determine graduate employability. Sesethu, Ludwe and Faith, among others, strongly emphasised behaviours and personal attributes as the key skills for employability.

Findings of the study agree with Cohen (2015) and Boardea (2014) on the role of love for people as a key attribute for HR employability. Doing what you love also reduces turnover and burnout and is an excellent employee retention method. When organisations employ professionals who enjoy their jobs, it creates an effective work environment.

Emotional intelligence, self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem as attributes of employability were identified by practitioners as the critical skills as they remain engraved with one throughout the career journey. Emotional self-efficacy (emotional intelligence) is an important predictor of graduate employability and career satisfaction (Aziz, & Pangil, 2017; Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Di Fabio, & Kenny, 2015; Pool, 2017; Pool & Sewell, 2007; Syed *et al.*, 2014; Dacre *et al.*, 2013), as found in the study. In line with Lowden, et al. (2011), the study identified a positive attitude (Simon, Ann and Sesethu), self-management, teamwork (Siphokazi, Athenkosi, Boly and Craig), business and customer awareness (Athenkosi, Noluthando, Craig and Zubeida), problem solving (Athenkosi, Boly, Noluthando, Abbie and Ludwe) and literacy, application of numeracy and application of information technology employability skills as vital skill for HR practitioners. Consistent to the findings of Hansen (2002), the study identified adaptability, analytical, computer, creativity, decision making, facilitation, group problem solving, initiative, leadership, negotiation, organisational dynamics, planning /organisation research, resourcefulness, risk taking, sensitivity to diversity and team building as the relevant skills required by those taking an HR qualification.

In the selection and promotion of employees to key positions, soft skills such as leadership, communication, team building and entrepreneurial interest are found to be critical, as identified in Dacre et al. (2013) and Yassin et al. (2008). This was a finding echoed by the sentiments of the practitioners in this study. Findings from the study relating to generic employability are consistent with literature, as in the identification of employability HR skills, practitioners' first identified the basic employability skills which are not sector specific. These findings are consistent with Bridgstock (2009) who emphasised the role of employability skills in making one more attractive to prospective employers.

Unique to the study, practitioners gave an overview of factors which made their employability time longer or undesirable to prospective employers and these are discussed under HR competencies. This was the case as in the definition of competencies practitioners took a holistic orientation. It is important to note that these factors are not limited to the individual but also apply to the environment and legislation.

Employers and higher education do not agree on the exit level outcomes of graduates as they are concerned with the quality of graduates and education institutions contend that employers do not appreciate skills from graduates (Griesel & Parker, 2009). Findings from the study point to employers criticising the quality of graduates from universities in South Africa. In line with

Berg and Van Broekhuizen (2012), the South African education system in terms of HR is failing to produce the important skills required. This, however, still needs to be explored as the opinion of academics and graduates themselves was not sought in the study.

Due to the changes which have occurred, as found by the study, matric as an educational attainment used to be substantial enough to make one employable, but now in the knowledge-driven economy priority is given to incumbents with degree-level qualifications (Brown, *et al.*, 2003). The study further identified that employability is not only dependent on skills and academic knowledge. This is justified by the constant changes in the world of work which alters the relationship between academics and employers (Fallows & Stevens, 2000; Sermsuk, *et al.*, 2014; Vazquez, 2014; Guerrero *et al.*, 2014).

Employability skills are dynamic to the changes which are taking place in the world of work. Athenkosi indicated that a driver's licence and computer literacy gave one a competitive advantage in their time; however, in knowledge driven economies, although these are essential, they are no longer sufficient and do not give one an upper hand. In the current climate in which the rate of unemployment is increasing, higher qualifications are more favourable to employers. Athenkosi, Kimberly, Boly, Siphon and Simon then asserted that research is an employability skill which one requires to keep abreast with the challenges HR is facing.



The link between employability and self-marketability as established by De Vos and De Hauw, (2010) was also identified. Like other professions, such as sports graduates (Minten & Forsyth, 2014) and technical graduates (Rasul *et al.*, 2013), employability skills for those taking a career in HR are not well developed either. In the study it was observed that the first job which one acquires may not necessarily be the one of choice. This is similar to Pais (2012) and this study in which Siphe reported that he started off as a clerk and moved to HR when opportunities were available. Minten and Forsyth (2014) shared the same sentiment by noting that employability for graduates is not aligned to a single organisation or job. The highly competitive environment also exacerbates the scenario of graduates in non-graduate jobs, such as in the case of Siphe. 'Job security', 'better pay', 'increased choice of jobs' were themes identified from learners who enrol for degrees in making one more employable and aid one in planning career development. This finding is consistent with literature (Tymon (2013; 852) and shared by Siphon.

However, in looking at the time it took practitioners to get the first job, it was evident that those from historically disadvantaged rural universities took longer to acquire their first job (Jane, Sesethu and Babalwa). HR practitioners from experience concur on the value of volunteering

in developing employability skills (Tymon, 2013). Volunteering opened doors for individuals who had partaken in it. Employment agencies was another theme which emerged. In the study, it was reported that they played a proactive role – based on the experiences of practitioners. Employment agencies boost employability skills and also align individuals to an occupation of their choice. This limits the time one takes to acquire a job; however, as also alluded to by practitioners, it is dependent on the volumes of people with a similar qualification. According to the study, the following all play a vital role: practical work experience (Rob, Siphe, Zubeida, Nicole, Ludwe, Siphon, Ann and Peter) and internships (Athenkosi, Ann and Charisa), volunteering (Zubeida Simon, Rob, Mpho, Ann and Charisa), easy access to job market, attitude, willingness to learn, networking, further education, extracurricular activities, positive thinking and skills, recommendation, right qualification, and creativity. This finding is constant with the literature (Pavelka, 2014; Lambrechts *et al.*, 2013; Robles, 2012).

Similar to the skills identified in the study, among others, ethics, research, understanding of cultural diversity, basic finance, application of sector specific knowledge are key for the HR profession. In the current South African climate, ethics has become an area of high importance. As observed from the Fletcher *et al.* (2016), ethics is a priority for employability and based on finding from the current study, ethics is not only important for employability but is a pillar in the SABPP competency model. However, literature in HR identifies ethics as a trait of leadership. Qebo, Noluthando, Penny, Ludwe, Unathi, Kimberly and Chan highlighted the value of ethics to employability. Practitioner identified the environment and enabling environment, hard worker, working during vacation, adequate skills and soft skills, job searching and recruitment agencies, right qualification, developmental courses and further training, networking and volunteering, experience, passion for the job, personal attributes (emotional intelligence, personality, positive psychology, attitude, behavioural competencies, critical thinking skills, emotional maturity) as ideal functional and personal attributes.

In the study context, the HR curriculum is not sufficient in the equipping of basic HR employability skills. HR graduates are not spared as respondents advocated for the teaching of employability skills during the last semester to enhance their work readiness and employability skills. The South African education system is still failing to produce all the skills required (Van Der Berg & Van Broekhuizen, 2012).

Cohen (2015) places the future for HR on specialised knowledge, academic preparation and practical experience. Johnson and King (2002) criticised the HR curriculum as it is focused on

the development of hard skills in South Africa. The researcher observed that curriculums are aligned in the same way as practitioners criticised new job entrance based on their failure to display soft skills.

Quality for graduates is determined by employers (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013), and in the case of HR and South Africa the professional body serves as a benchmark for what quality is regarding HR practices and standards. The study heeds the call to incorporate practitioners in the development of curricula (Johnson & King, 2002) as they are the users of the end products. Focus of higher education seems to be on the short-term skills (Minten & Forsyth 2014; Bridgstock, 2009); however, as HR is in the process of professionalisation, the focus must be on the long term as when individuals are better prepared for a contribution they are likely to make meaningful contributions. In trying to address the gap between the stakeholders in employability, the study affirms the role of the professional body in bridging the gap between employers and institutions of learning. This is explored further in the following discussion.

The study agrees that hard skills are not only essential for employability but are crucial to the competency of lifelong learning which is essential to career progression (Bañeres & Conesa, 2016; Estienne, 1997; Fejes, 2014; Moir & Crowther, 2014; Quendler, & Lamb, 2016; Rigopoulou & Kehagias, 2008; Trede, & McEwen, 2015). As identified by practitioners in the development of hard skills, people who get below 65% are less trainable or are expensive to train and thus not employable. For this reason, when in HR, it is essential to have marks higher than 65%. There seems to be little if any literature which supports this finding. Hard skills are crucial for career success. Practitioners proffered that in most instances graduates are only able to put hard skills in place about two years after starting their job.

The labour market assigns greater value to masters' qualifications than to first degrees (Sin *et al.*, 2016). Findings of the study seem to suggest that for HR, a master's qualification is not that essential as one can progress to senior positions of an organisation with an honours. However, professional qualifications seem to carry more weight as do conferences which add CDP points to one's career. In the study, practitioners had professional registration which is contrary to the notion of higher qualifications raised by Sin *et al.* (2016).

Focusing on the new competencies and neglecting the traditional competencies is a weakness, as McEvoy *et al.* (2005); Giannantonio and Hurley, (2002) indicated that traditional competencies are still key as they define HR and must be rated strongly in an organisation. The study also identified factors which make one unemployable.

The battle for HR does not end with employability, the generic employability and career success were found to be drivers/determinants of career success. Thus, one who has mastered the employability skills is able to ascend in the hierarchy. The study emphasises that learning does not end in the classroom but extends to the workplace and is key to one's ascendancy in the organisation hierarchy. The world of work is continuously changing and thus HR has to keep abreast and embrace the new responsibilities which arise.

It is disconcerting to note that 20 years since the collapse of apartheid and into the democratisation of society, South Africa's stability is under threat due to poverty and socioeconomic inequality. When the SABPP was formed, one of its mandates was to address equality. However, 23 years on the same challenge sits on the table. Equity legislation which was introduced to redress the imbalances of the past also influences employability. Elevation of individuals from previously advantaged groups to the hierarchy is controlled as some senior positions have been reserved as equity positions (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Mancinelli *et al.*, 2010; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2014).

Equity legislation also hindered employability as some practitioners were not able to progress due to the positions being reserved for equity. The study affirms the extension to the definition of employability as it is not only limited to acquiring employment. Hartz (2003) in Germany identified that legislation influences employability. In South Africa, consistent with this finding, practitioners in the study also identified how legislation was a stumbling block not only to career success but also to employability. Legislation on equity enhanced employability of designated groups in South Africa and most organisations are seeking to address the imbalances of the past and are reserving senior positions for people from designated groups. This in turn reduces the employability of people who were beneficiaries of the previous dispensation. In addition to these weaknesses, there is a lack of HR employability literature and there are not enough practical and solid technical skills which justify HR.

In sector-specific employability, the generic skills are crucial for HR employability. As the study was qualitative, practitioners identified the competencies but were not required to rate the HR competencies. The study also affirms the definition of employability, which goes beyond acquiring employment and includes keeping and sustaining a job and moving up the hierarchy.

In the development of acquiring hard skills, HR is in a dilemma as they still have to master the traditional competencies while acquiring the new competencies. The challenge comes in the

curriculation as these competencies are known to practitioners and as identified, academics are too theoretical which implies that practitioners might not be coping with the needs of the profession.

The first gap the study covered was the identification of soft skills key to HR employability and career success within South Africa. The study cements the need for employability and career success skills to be included in the curriculum.

6.4.2 Career success within the HR profession

In line with literature, the definition of employability by practitioners extends beyond acquiring employment but keeping it and moving up along the selected occupation. This justifies the role of soft skills in determining career success. The study offers evidence to success being achieved when practitioners translate what they have learnt at university so as to accomplish the demands of work (Abderhalden, Snyder, & Evans, 2016; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017; Weisz & Smith, 2005; Knight, & Yorke, 2004). The study also affirms the dual nature of career success (Johnston & Phelan, 2016; Mulhall, 2016; Yao & Thorn, 2016). Another way of viewing career success is viewing it as interdependent to the subjective and objective career success (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). The findings of the study correspond with the interdependence of subjective and objective career success which is outlined by the methodology approach adopted. The researcher shares the interdependent effect as it talks better to the environment HR operates in. The interdependence of objective and subjective career success also makes it difficult to outright state the position of career success and some participants in the study gave a contradicting view. For example, one participant was satisfied with the subjective elements but not happy with the objective as regarding the case of affirmative action as hindrance to career progression. One can be paid above the market rate but will not move up the hierarchy. The presence of a hindrance does not ascertain low satisfaction. I argue so as, in deriving the meaning of career success, contribution to strategy was identified as the main element in defining the meaning of career success for practitioners.

From the objective of the study the researcher sought to explore the experiences of participants which led to career success. In line with literature, the disjuncture between employability and career success is challenging to differentiate. These findings are essential as they add to the narrative that regardless of sector employability which is growing to beyond acquiring employment, but includes maintaining work and progressing and making meaningful contributions. This is so as the definition of employability and the experiences of practitioners

are in line with lifelong learning. This is a trait which employers value as they recruit graduates who are trainable and can be of greater use in the future. The meaning of career success was identified in the study. Themes which emerged from the objective measures, which are consistent with studies which followed a positivistic orientation, were salary, salary growth, promotion, career progression.

Thus, career success is multifaceted (Shockley *et al.*, 2016; Spurk *et al.*, 2016; Gunz & Heslin, 2005) and thus not limited even for a homogenous group. Experiences will always differ and one's background too is a factor which contributes to career success, as identified in the study. Practitioners from a previously disadvantaged era viewed getting out of their situation and holding a position of influence as a measure of success.

Defining career success from literature encompasses a number of promotions between positions (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Abderhalden *et al.*, 2016; Knight, & Yorke, 2004; Kolar *et al.*, 2017; Weisz & Smith, 2005), interpersonal success, financial success (Gattiker & Larwood 1986), work experiences over time (Arthur *et al.*, 1989), positive psychological, work-related outcomes or achievements one accumulates as a result of work experiences (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Arthur *et al.*, 2005; De Vos & Soens, 2008; Heslin & Turban, 2016; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Zhu *et al.*, 2013), accomplishments over time (Arthur *et al.*, 2005). Practitioners' opinion on career success cut across all the realms as they identified the traditional, physical and positive psychological attributes, with the consultant factor in the identification of the constructs being the element time. For success to be observable it need to happen over a period of time. Accomplishments are the result of time and effort.

Consistent with literature (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001), the size of the organisation determines how much one earns. Furthermore, conditions which are not favourable, such as career stagnation and unmet expectations, impede individuals' efforts to attain higher salaries. This is in line with Bozionelos *et al.* (2016); Kraimer *et al.* (2011); Ng and Feldman, (2014) and Westring *et al.* (2016).

Practitioners identified that career success basics start from one being able to translate theory into practice (effective performance). As alluded to in the study, in most cases in HR the first two years of employment may really not make use of the theory, and it only takes personal attributes to be able to harness what one has learnt and be able to use the theory to accelerate the HR career. According to Whitehead (2001), the meaning of career success can be very subjective. Although the study focused on a single profession, the different realms and

industries which practitioners work in make it more challenging to work in HR. Factors such as size and the availability of clear career pathing are instrumental for career success.

Most participants in the study were female; however, due to the sampling methods adopted and the shortcoming, it does not confirm the assertion that HR is a female-dominated profession. Literature does however justify the ascendance of women to redress discrimination (Abele *et al.*, 2016; Bagilhole, 2002; Frederiksen & Kato, 2017; Grint, 1988). In the study it was interesting to note that no female relied on the legislation to ascend or for career progression.

Unlike Cross and Bagilhole, (2002), Zhu *et al.* (2016) found inequalities still exist and it is argued that women in the labour market still occupy lower levels in the hierarchy, wages or salary, status and authority. The study found that regardless of gender, practitioners were paid according to the market rates. Justification can be the occupation they took, thus they ensured they were rewarded according to the market and their contribution.

The objective of equity legislation is clearly outlined (Baruch *et al.*, 2016; Chinyamurindi, 2016; Santos, 2016; Zhu, *et al.*, 2016). Legislation in the context of the study was an antecedent to white HR professionals as positions which were reserved for equity were found. They were allowed to occupy the positions in an acting capacity but not to be appointed. This is an interesting find; literature is scant regarding this as issues of race in the current dispensation seems to be sensitive.

The study found that entrepreneurial orientation is crucial for career success. Individuals' skills are sometimes made redundant in organisations; however, consulting/HR consulting is a solace for them and practitioners observed that there are numerous opportunities for entrepreneurship, especially when one knows the profession. Practitioners who worked in organisations which had no clear structure of career pathing had a negative outlook regarding their success, as there was less room for growth and progression and they were not able to harness their skills. The objective measures of career success, such as salary, salary growth, and promotion are also indicators of traditional careers. In the study this was seen as true as most if not all practitioners viewed success not as intangible, but the observable factors such as following a rigid structure with secure employment. In as much as careers are known to be progressing (Baruch, 2006; De Vos & De Hauw, 2010), emphasis was put on the subjective elements of career success.

The study affirms literature in that practitioners' personality must be aligned with the profession of their choice. If not, it will in the long run hinder subjective and objective career success. This is consistent with Abele *et al.* (2016); Gelissen, de Graaf, (2006); Spurk, Keller

and Hirschi (2016); Turban, Moake, Wu, and Cheung (2017); and Yang and Chau (2016). However, in adopting the findings, the researcher is consistent with Gelissen, de Graaf (2006) whose study found no association between personality and career success. In justifying personality, themes emerged on the challenges the profession is facing, such as resilience and love for people which were identified as crucial for career success. Due to the qualitative approach of the study, it was challenging to explicitly identify the effect of culture on career success in the South African multicultural context. Although practitioners stated that they interact with individuals from numerous backgrounds, the impact thereof was not felt.

The study identified that careers have become boundary-less as practitioners move from one organisation to the next in search for higher positions and better income. In line with boundaryless career success, to move up the hierarchy and get more income, practitioners are characterised by inter-firm mobility (Briscoe *et al.*, 2006; Hoekstra, 2011). Some practitioners stated that they had worked as expatriates, and when they moved back home they were even prepared to take a salary cut just to work at home. Thus careers are no longer aligned along the traditional career, globalisation has altered this and the search for greener pastures justifies inter-firm mobility.



In line with the protean career (Hall; 1996; Minten & Forsyth, 2014), the study identified the values required for the profession as shared by the senior HR practitioners. Being recognised, having a sense of belonging, contributing to strategy were all identified as key elements in the derivation of HR competencies. In identifying the meaning of career success, having a superior who has no HR background is factor which impedes the success of practitioners. These leaders do not have the solid foundation for HR nor passion to enhance HR. There can be no universal agreement to the meaning of career success as stated by Whitehead (2001) who identified career path, economic structure and industry demands. Findings of the study concur with this assertion. In line with professionalisation, findings of the study offer justification for the protean career in the identification of values (Hall 1996; Minten & Forsyth, 2014).

The study affirms Seibert and Kraimer's (2001) assertion that individuals are responsible for managing their own career. In the study, practitioners stated they were responsible for managing their own careers, which enabled them to be the drivers of their careers and identify their stumbling blocks in their careers. This becomes a problem in organisations with no career pathing or lateral hierarchies. Based on findings of the study, being entrepreneurial, managing career progression, searching for greener pastures, and where one starts do not determine were

one ends. Varshne (2013) identified a job incumbent as the driver of their mobility. In the study, regardless of the challenges practitioners faced, they remained resolute and resilient and are keeping an eye on the bigger picture which is where HR must be. Practitioners believed that their efforts are a stepping stone to those who will follow in the HR journey. In line with the career construction theory, practitioners are responsible for shaping their career paths (Del Corso & Rehfluss, 2011). Practitioners gave a holistic and practical description of how they equipped themselves with adaptation skills (Corso & Rehfluss, 2011) to remain relevant in their careers. The career construction theory thus gives justification to why employability skills are relevant for career success as one has to continuously adapt to the changes HR is facing. In so doing, life themes that drive behaviour counsellors can help individuals identify their vocational personality and career adaptability when obstacles emerge (Del Corso & Rehfluss, 2011).

In the study, the objective measures for career success (Abderhalden, *et al.*, 2016; Abele & Spurk, 2009; Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Dodangoda, & Arachchige, 2017; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Shockley *et al.*, 2016; Spurk *et al.*, 2016; Sultana *et al.*, 2016) were hierarchical status, salary, salary growth and promotion status, progression through different jobs, income, access to learning, the importance of work versus personal, family time and employment security. Practitioners in the study did not emphasise the balancing of work/family conflict as it was not a major objective in the study. Practitioners however indicated their work rate and with a senior position came new challenges and new responsibilities and this can impact work/family conflict. Hierarchical status, salary, salary growth and promotions status, progression through different jobs, income, access to learning, the importance of work versus personal life, family time and employment security were all identified as indicators of objective career success.

The study's definition of career success was consistent with literature. The major themes which emerged were consistent with literature and included career mobility, income, job level, employment security, work rate and these included constructs of both objective and subjective career success. The accomplishment in HR synonymous to HR was being recognised for efforts and contributing to strategy. This echoes Lyness and Thompson (1997) who identified organisational stature as an objective measure of career success.

Salary level and promotion served as dependent measures of objective career success, and subjective career success was represented by career satisfaction. The study affirms the work

of Ng et al. (2005) in that educational, personal, and professional experiences are human capital experiences which enhance career attainment frequently examined as a predictor of career success (Judge *et al.*, 1995; Wayne *et al.*, 1999) and which emerged as conceptually distinct constructs of career success.

De Vos and De Hauw, (2010) and Nauta, et al. (2009) confirmed the importance of organisation support in enhancing employability. Practitioners stated they were willing to stay in organisations which recognised HR and where there was room for progression. The study found that lack of support within organisations was a cause for career dissatisfaction. Thus, findings confirm the role of organisational support in enhancing employability and career success. In organisations where HR was supported it contributed to strategy and practitioners there were more satisfied with their jobs.

In relation to subjective career success, in line with literature (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Arthur *et al.*, 2005; Dodangoda, & Arachchige, 2017; Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, 2017; Kolar, von Treuer, & Koh, 2017), the study found career satisfaction, comparative judgments, or job satisfaction as indicators of subjective career success. However, in relation to sector specific employability, the meaning of career success was derived from the subjective constructs.



Practitioners stated that feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment in their career (De Vos & De Hauw, 2010; Teodorescu, Furnham, & MacRae, 2017; Zaman *et al.*, 2016) were expressed through the dissatisfaction over the lack of recognition and failure of their contributions being acknowledged.

Arthur et al. (2005) noted that members of different social categories do not necessarily share the same subjective career orientation. In line with this, the study also noted that the environment/organisations which practitioners operated in was a reason for the different categories of career success. How HR is perceived by other members who sit at the strategic table, was dependent on the organisation. This is also supported by Dai and Song (2016) and Seibert and Kraimer (2001) who stated that subjective career success is highly influenced/dependant on one's own evaluation in relation to personal goals and set expectations. When personal goals and set expectations are not met, then one is dissatisfied.

According to Parker and Chusmir (1991), success in life, personal fulfilment and contribution to society, are subjective measures of career success. Similarly, the study found these to be essential components in determining subjective success.

Empirically, there is paucity of literature regarding sector-specific career success in relation to HR practitioners. However, reflections in the study do cement the general meaning of career success and how the contracts of both objective and subjective career success drive career success. The study, from the experiences of study participants, has given meaning to what it comprises to be satisfied with the objective and subjective measures.

It is essential to note that regarding practitioners, the sector in which one works does not influence one's success. This is as practitioners in the study were solely focused on the HR operating environment rather than the sector. The size of the organisation contributed to objective measures of career success as the bigger the organisation the more likely one earns more income at a senior level. This finding is consistent with Judge et al (1995).

The study classifies employability competencies, which are for new job entrance and career success which practitioners require when they have the necessary experience to progress. These competencies comprise vocational work experience, personality, learn from mistakes, practical work experience and internships, equity legislation, being a people person, networking, emotional intelligence, fast thinker, recommendation, behavioural competencies, put theory in practice, easy access to job market, critical thinking, sound oral communication, extra curriculum activities, emotional maturity, willingness to learn, resilience, initiative, positive attitude, research on employability skills, problem solving, work ethic, right qualification, attention to detail, sound verbal communication, recruitment agencies, quality oriented, and creativity.

The findings in the study contradicts Weisz (1999) who identified little correlation between academic achievement and levels of generic skills, which suggested that employability is not always related to academic ability. Meritocracy in an environment flooded by one qualification hinders progression.

6.4.3 Refining the HR competencies for practitioners in South Africa.

The study offers an insight into the weaknesses of competency models. Regarding the definitions of competencies, literature (McClelland, 1973; Boyatzis, 1982), Spencer and Spencer (1993), Tripathi and Agrawal, (2014), McEvoy et al. (2005), Coetzee and Shreuder, 2012) offers a holistic orientation to the term but when it comes to competency models, attributes and behaviours synonymous to models are mostly overlooked.

The study confirms Coetzee and Shreuder (2012) who noted that competencies must incorporate human attributes (functional and personal attributes). This finding is at odds with Kurz and Bartram (2002) and Francis-Smythe et al. (2006) who excluded behaviours and performance in defining competencies. These reflections are then in harmony to Naidoo et al. (nd) who related to knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed to perform well and capabilities limited to specific tasks not the overall job.

The process of competency development starts in the workplace; this finding in literature seems to add to the conflicts which exist between practitioners and academics. The criticism of academics is that they are producing graduates who are not ready to face the world of work. Thus practitioners' advice is that a mini module on employability be taught in the final year to better prepare candidates for the world of work and enhance their work readiness.

In their experience, practitioners have echoed these sentiments as their competitiveness, knowledge sharing and cooperating technological efforts (Draganidis, & Mentzas, 2006) are enhanced by a competency-based orientation. Lifelong learning was also seen to contribute to employees' happiness in life which is contrary to the findings of Rigopoulou and Kehagias (2008).



The value of competencies and the roles they play in lifelong learning was affirmed by practitioners. It is important to note that both hard skills and soft skills are key to both employability and career success and in the case of the study, ultimate job performance, as also found in Coetzee and Shreuder, (2012). In the study, practitioners identified lifelong learning as a skill that when mastered enhances them in their career progression and improves organisation effectiveness. This finding is consistent with the work of Bañeres and Conesa (2016); Estienne (1997); Fejes (2014); Moir and Crowther (2014); Quendler and Lamb (2016); Trede, and McEwen (2015).

In South Africa, similar to Chow et al. (2013); Lazarova et al. (2017); Marler and Parry (2016), HR is undergoing strategic orientation. The study also finds HR as essential in South African organisations which is affirmed by Meyer (2014); Schutte and Barkhuizen (2016); Schutte et al. (2016); and van Rensburg et al. (2011). However, the role of HR is found to contain clerical, administrative, managerial, executive, and strategic partner constructs (Budhwar, 2009) as each organisation has its own areas it prioritised. This was also highlighted by practitioners who were employed in the public service who put emphasis on traditional competencies as key due to the structural challenges within their work environment. This also confirms Boudreau

(2014) who criticised the slow pace in which change within the profession is taking place; and not all organisations have embraced the new roles of HR (Boudreau, 2014; Cohen, 2015; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). In spite of the challenges facing HR, similar to Van Rensburg et al. (2011), the study found HR in South Africa to be of international status although recognition was not yet fully established by all organisations. Findings from the study do not affirm this, as there are numerous challenges which HR still needs to address within the workplace.

HR in some organisations were viewed as a low priority area, similar to literature (Barney & Wright, 1998; Sandholtz & Burrows, 2016). Contrary to Boudreau (2014) who observed the lack of evidence regarding HR's constituents demanding to achieve more than the status quo. Practitioners in the study demanded better conditions in terms of recognition rather than to maintain the status quo.

In a study by Lawler (2004) less than 40% of HR executives surveyed reported that HR management is a full partner in strategy development. In the study, not all practitioners had reached the strategic level, it was only in organisations in which HR was recognised that HR was strategic. Most were fighting for a seat at the boardroom table and some were not willing to move to the boardroom.



As the curriculum or education system is blamed for poorly preparing graduates for the profession, this can be the reason why HR practitioners are poorly equipped regarding strategic aspects (Angrave *et al.*, 2016; Selmer & Chiu, 2004; Ulrich & Dulebohn 2015). The gap between academics still exists as practitioners viewed graduates as not work ready. This is in line with Cohen, (2015) who found a gap between what HR academics cover and what HR practitioners show concern to. The areas of prioritisation are not clearly spelt out.

In the study practitioners reported that some of their HR leaders did not have an HR background. Similar to Meisinger (2006), dumping to HR was still taking place as some practitioners who worked in HR did not necessarily have an HR-related qualification. With the value of HR qualifications, entry into an HR career is no longer guaranteed (Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). The challenge still remains on how HR qualifications still fail to adequately prepare those coming to the profession. This finding is in line to Johnson and King (2002) who found that HR degrees were not adequate enough to prepare HR practitioners for their roles.

Serim et al. (2014) purported that due to the war on talent and changes in the workforce dynamics, HR is linking to financial performance so as to create value to organisations. Practitioners also advocate the need for financial knowledge within HR so that the financial

contribution can be assessed. Johnson and King's (2002) findings indicate that practitioners who possessed business knowledge, delivery of HR, and management of change were viewed as more effective leaders by co-workers. In the study, practitioners with business knowledge contributed to strategy and were more effective in their organisations.

In defining competencies, findings are in line with the value they have to an organisation (Robertson *et al.*, 2002; Ulrich, 1995) and attain a sustainable competitive advantage. Practitioners in defining competencies not only limit them to job requirements, but also include the personal characteristics which enable effective performance. Capabilities, activities, processes and responses available to enable a range of work demands (Kurz & Bartram, 2002; Francis-Smythe *et al.*, 2006) were incorporated in the definition.

Francis-Smythe *et al.*'s (2006) assertion of the effectiveness of competency models is enhanced by practitioners as they have highlighted that the competency model has set benchmarks for the profession and thus from an HR perspective a training needs analysis can be conducted by an incumbent as they can introspect about their career. Francis-Smythe *et al.* (2006) and Gangani *et al.* (2004) advocated for a gap analysis in the identification of areas of improvement. Coetzee and Shreuder (2012) added matching and meeting organisation goals. In line with literature, the study findings point to competency models as serving the mandate of the HR profession.



Regarding practitioners' input on the applicability of the competency model, the researcher is mindful of the deception in the assumption that competency models always work (Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2006). In this study, practitioners stated that they had catered for this shortcoming by adopting models of HR which talk to their organisation. Competency models are used in recruitment and selection and as HR is moving towards professionalisation, the HR competency framework serves as a guide for those willing to be in the profession. Practitioners accepted the competency model as it gave uniformity and gave HR a voice not only in organisations but in South Africa. With the SABPP competency model, HR's role in the boardroom is cemented as it is a confidence booster for professionals who embraced the model.

Competency modelling comes with its own challenges as alluded to by Serim *et al.* (2014) and in the study practitioners agreed that the rate of change taking place makes the competency model rather reactive to the requirements of the profession. Briscoe and Hall (1997) contended that this results in models being misplaced. As a step to occupational-based skills (Coetzee &

Shreuder, 2012), the study serves as a benchmark. Competencies of HR which create innovation and value are deemed as essential in organisations (Serima *et al.*, 2014).

The hindrance on HR competencies is their relevance is specific to meeting strategic organisational goals (Klett, 2010). This can be one of the main reasons why some senior practitioners have not bought in the agenda as they have what works for them. Due to the costs associated with competency models, they fail to focus on the human attributes. In the study, practitioners' reflections on essential competencies were focused on the attributes.

With the challenges and rapid change, the SABPP competency model seems to offer a one size fits all approach, and practitioners emphasised that they have their own models which suit their organisations and they use the SABPP as a generic model. Francis-Smythe (2006) identified that it is a platform for developing workplace models. Models used in the workplace are not necessarily validated by academics. This disjuncture adds to the war between academics and practitioners. From this perspective, practitioners point to what works for the organisation, and academics want what works to be theoretically grounded.

The HR professionalising agenda in South Africa is following the steps identified by Williams et al (2009). HR in South Africa is a full-time occupation, there are training schools for HR, there are two professional bodies and there is an HR code of ethics crafted by the SABPP. However, the challenge in professionalisation is getting buy-in from all the stakeholders in the profession. Not all the qualifications and not all universities have had their HR qualifications audited by the professional body. Aguinis and Lengnick-Hall (2012) advocated for a valid criteria in the certification. Practitioners agreed that HR has numerous areas of specialisation, this further frustrates the certification criteria. However, the major unifier is that a practitioner who contributes to or sits in the boardroom should master all if not most of the critical areas in HR.

Cohen (2015) further asserted the need for assessment at all the levels. This is a thorn in the flesh as during the data collection some practitioners viewed the study as assessment criteria for their competencies and opted not to participate. However, these are essential steps to professionalisation, it is a painful road and some will be affected. This can also be attributed to practitioners who are appointed to lead in HR and do not have any theoretical foundation; although numbers are reducing in some sectors, HR is still a dumping ground (Klimoski, 2001) for failed executives. At entry level, HR qualifications are now a prerequisite for employment and thus HR professionalisation is moving in the right direction

It is important to note that in South Africa certification of HR qualifications by the professional body is governed by SAQA (Van Rensburg, 2011). In most countries, competency models adopted have been modified from professional bodies, (Selmer & Chiu 2004); similarly in South Africa some practitioners in strengthening their models used the SABPP competency model as a prototype. What was noted in this study is the existence of models within organisations and that the 2012 competency model was viewed as a modification of the previous model. Practitioners did not wait for 2012 to have competency models but used other existing models, following the work of Ulrich as he is the engineer of HR competencies. Although the models are international and HR is a universal field, application is dependant on the environment it operates in.

In literature, competency models have been categorised according to the scholars and have been simplified to range from 4 upwards. For instance, Ulrich et al (1995) study had 4 competencies which were; business, personal credibility, HR functional expertise, and management of change; Selmer and Chiu, (2004) study also had 4 (leadership, organisational involvement, individual style, and technical activities competencies) which were not necessarily similar to the ones of Ulrich et al. (1995); Ulrich, (1997) identified computer literacy; financial management, external competitive and customer demands, able to work with the line managers and community effectively.



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Basic understanding, knowledge and expertise form a core set of areas. Practitioners translate what they know to business success. The key is competencies and behaviours needed; competencies do not stand on their own but need to be followed by behaviour. In application, practitioners need to translate HR knowledge into business success using eight behaviours critical for an HR professional. Competencies and behaviours are critical for success.

The flat structures of some organisations and HR not being recognised were factors which led to some practitioners resigning from their current posts to search for employment elsewhere. They 'migrated' to organisations where growth and promotion were possible.

It is worrisome to observe that the assertion by Barney and Wright (1998) is still a reality for some practitioners in the current environment. Holland and De Cieri (2006) indicated that gaps still existed and there were challenges which professions have to manage. This further points to the milestones which HR must overcome in South Africa. This neglect, as stated by Selmer and Chiu (2004), in Hong Kong leads to HR being underequipped to play strategic roles.

HR functions in the current market are aligned with strategies for the long term, with changes in communities, industrial relations systems, economic conditions, legislation, global, and technological issues as well as new directions in business operations (Abdullah Raja & Juhary 2011).

Regarding the subjective elements which influence career success, monetary wise, it was observed that the size of the organisation determines how much one earns and practitioners shared the sentiment that although individuals can never be satisfied with what they earn, their salaries were market related. As we move up the organisation prospects of growth are dependent on whether the incumbent occupying a position moves or has vacated the position. Prospects for growth, as observed, were at external organisations. The major downfall of the competency model is its failure to address the motives and traits; however, the SABPP competency model identifies the skills and essential knowledge for HR. In the study, practitioners who had worked outside the country took a salary cut, in order to be working in South Africa.

The SABPP competency model is useful to practitioners in South Africa and it is being used as a prototype by some organisations. Further, some organisations are aligning the framework of the model to that of their respective organisation, for example the public service. Sound knowledge of the organisation which one works in and business acumen enable a one to perform effectively. Simon complimented the model as it speaks to the critical issues which HR needs to focus on so as to achieve goals in the organisation

In the study it was observed that practitioners who worked in the public service placed much emphasis on the traditional competencies. In as much as HR is known to be evolving globally, practitioners noted that overlooking the basic (traditional) competencies has catastrophic consequences for the modern competences. Mastering the traditional competencies is complementary and a prerequisite of the modern competencies, through the infusion of strategic orientation in day-to-day employee behaviour (Serim *et al.*, 2014). Somewhat similar to Cohen (2015), HR is an essential administrative tool, not strategic. Selmer and Chiu (2004) gave lack of formal training as one of the reasons for this but practitioners in the service attributed it to lack of passion for the profession

In the study it was observed that in the different sectors in South Africa HR was on its own wave per organisation and the driving factor was how it is viewed by other professionals. The comforting factor is that practitioners stated they were aware of the need for HR to speak with

one voice by adopting a single wave. The SABPP competency model is key to HR moving to the strategic wave.

The SABPP competency model is categorised into four pillars, core competencies and the five capabilities. From literature, HR practitioners were identified to be poorly equipped for strategic aspects (Cohen, 2015; Selmer & Chiu, 2004; Sheehan *et al.*, 2006). Practitioners in this study reflected that the lack of opportunities and lack of confidence from fellow managers in their capabilities in contributing to strategy made them look “incompetent”.

There was an argument about the value which modern HR can play (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). There is still more that needs to be done to close the gaps between HR academics and HR practitioners (Deadrick in Gibson, 2009, in Cohen, 2015). Taking strides towards this, the SABPP had its first research and work conference at which part of the findings of this study were presented to practitioners. Such platforms are a good foundation for bridging the gap as they give room to individuals with a passion for the profession to craft the way forwards and reduce gaps between HR academics and HR practitioners.

Abbott et al (2013) argued that there can be no one size fits all approach as challenges facing HR are uniform. This cements the position of practitioners who revised their models after the SABPP had been introduced to make it relevant to their work contexts. Some had the work of Ulrich thus from Abbot et al. (2013) and as HR challenges are uniform, it is justifiable to adopt foreign models and align them to the current context. The merit of the SABPP competency model is that it comes as a refinement of various models which existed prior it. Zhu, Thomson, and De Cieri (2008) criticised this notion as the developed and developing environments’ contexts thus necessitate refinement of the model.

The clear cut roles of HR between junior and managerial HR were indicated by Van Rensburg, et al. (2011). Criticism of the SABPP competency model was due to its failure to classify which sectors or at which levels one must know them. Some practitioners noted with importance that after two years to specialisation, and depending on area of specialisation, one must be competent in all the areas in the model as they are essential for one to move up the hierarchy. When one masters the competencies at an early stage, it is easier moving up the hierarchy and contributing

Practitioners in the study who already had working competency models attributed it to them following the developments which were taking place in the USA. Draganidis and Mentzas (2006) and Tripathi and Agrawal (2014) found this in their contexts and this is true for the

South African contexts. Some practitioners stated that the model was not new to them and it was similar to the work of Ulrich and his colleagues.

Van Rensburg et al. (2011) talked of the lack of universally accepted standards of qualification and the fear of practitioners to be reassessed as a measure of professional registration. In conducting the study, I came across multiple respondents who upon hearing the purpose of the study quickly withdrew as it made them feel uncomfortable and they feared meeting the current standard of HR in South Africa. Some of practitioners who participated had the required qualification.

The HR programmes overlook some skills such as analytic skills which are essential to strategy. Thus practitioners fail as they will not talk the language of strategy. A danger identified in the study is HR forgetting its basics or failing to execute these basics well. HR has to execute basic duties to reap returns on investment.

HR contributing to strategy is a long term function (Serim *et al.*, 2014). Thus HR professionalisation and the SABPP competency model are there as a guide to the strategic function. Practitioners in the study also identified the challenges South Africa is facing and how they affect the profession. In South Africa, imbalances of the past and high unemployment followed by mass production of graduates are among the challenges identified. These sentiments are shared by Abbott, et al. (2013).

The focus on competencies and HR competencies is not a new phenomenon (Tripathi & Agrawal 2014; Draganidis & Mentzas, 2006; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014). With the competency model HR have embraced the world of work since 1970.

The HR competency model has been embraced by practitioners as competencies are used as a benchmark for HR practices (Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014) as they infuse the major HR competency models. As observed, some institutions are now certifying their qualifications with the standards set by the HR professional body. Although Zhu et al. (2013) explicitly stated that opinions of one respondent do not suffice on all matters pertaining to HR. From the study's perspective, the experiences of those in the profession are vital in the identification of critical areas. Evidence from the study proves that with experience in different sectors, the challenges and advancement were similar.

Several studies (Ulrich, 1997; (Novak, Žnidaršič, & Šprajc, 2015; Long, 2008) have affirmed the importance of HR competency models. This study similar to others (Heneman, 1999;

Storey, 2014; Ulrich, 2013; Gangani, McLean & Braden, 2004; Johnson & King, 2002; Tripathi & Agrawal, 2014; and Zhu *et al.*, 2008) identified traditional and modern HR competencies as the critical areas in HR.

HR practitioners agree on the concern for professional competence and own knowledge within HR and view it as imperative (Meyer, 2014; Schutte & Barkhuizen, 2016; Schutte, Barkhuizen, & van der Sluis, 2016; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011). There is consensus in literature on the added responsibilities for HR professionals (Selmer & Chiu, 2004; Brewster, Farndale, & van Ommeren, 2000). Similar to Johnson and King (2002), there is consensus from practitioners and scholars on the changes that have taken place in the HR agenda. In the identification of competencies, practitioners they did not limit themselves. Traditional and modern competencies were identified in the literature. Practitioners, however, went further to identify the behaviours and personal attributes for HR. Competencies identified in the literature have all been linked to effective performance and HRs effectiveness in attaining a seat in the boardroom.

Table 6.1: HR employability competencies

HR administration	Technology	Knowledge of the labour legal framework	Negotiator	Basic finance skills	Project management
Measurement of performance	Master all soft skills	Understanding how business works i.e. understanding organisation needs	Research	Trustworthy	Job content knowledge
Keeping abreast with HR trends	Citizen for the future	Customer care	Critical thinking	Confidentiality	Recruitment and selection
Cultural sensitivity	Learning and development	Ability to implement change	Strategy (build conceive and implement)	Remuneration and benefits administration	Advanced communication skills
Talent management	HR governance	Relationship management	employee wellness	Dispute resolution	Mentoring and coaching
Team builder Compliance	HR risk	Employee relations	HR compliance	Planning and organising	Analytics and measurement
Interpret policies	Decision taker	Eye for talent	HR and business knowledge	Interpersonal and communication	Ethics
Innovation	Leadership Organisation credibility	Solution creation and implementation	Personal credibility	Duty to society	HR service delivery

As the definition of employability extends to career success, the competencies identified extend to career success. The competencies are similar to literature; however, practitioners did not cluster the competencies. The clustering of competencies was identified as a major weakness of the SABPP competency model as the meanings of words tend to be subjective to a reader.

The study identified that HR needs to drive the organisation as shown in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2: HR competencies for career success

Accountable,	Project management,	Report writing,	Culture of work,	Competency modelling,	Sound arithmetic skills,
Professional conduct,	Risk assessment and compliance,	move from transactional HR to integrated HR which encompasses the modern	traditional HR competencies	interaction with others	Mentorship,
Critical thinking- using logic and reasoning,	Emotional maturity- handling anger anxiety, envy, resentment, and other negative emotions in a manner which does not affect performance	Initiative/ motivation- acting with urgency to achieve,	Health and safety,	Training needs analysis,	Job evaluation,
Legal compliance,	Budget,	strategies, Organization development, ,	Employee wellness,	Learning and development,	Managing teams,
coaching and mentoring	remuneration and benefits,	Benefits administration,	HR policies,	Employment relations,	Quality of life, Managing change in organisations,
being entrepreneurial,	Business partner,	recruitment and selection,	HR utilization planning and development,	Networking,	Able to work under pressure go the extra mile,
business knowledge Business acumen – plans to work and carry it out,	Workforce planning,	knowledge and skills and how to apply it to the work context,	Experience – leaned to take initiative and solve problems	HRIS, payroll,	People skills People management
Grievance handling procedures Mediation, Arbitration conflict management skills,	, Consumer behaviour	Administrative skills,	Leadership, Management,	Academic qualification and sector specific knowledge,	Constant updates with employer requirements.
Restructuring, mergers,	Innovation,	, cultural sensitivity,	Teamwork, Productivity, Planning are	decision making, ,	trustworthiness, Commitment
Work family conflict, , Employee relations,	acquisition and downsizing (manage),	problem solving skills,	Listening skills,	One must have the heart for work,	Personality,
Appointments must be made on merit and ability,	On boarding in most organisations,	emotional intelligence,	Relationship builder – internal and external,	Understand the value of relationships,	Be a coach,
Work independently,	Supervisory skills,	marketability,	Decision making- collecting and analysing information, ,	Political consciousness,	Committing action or resources in response to problems or opportunities,
committing actions and risks,	forming conclusions and making recommendations or choosing courses of action that are consistent with known facts	Identifying constraints and risks,	Ability to change- being able to adapt quickly changing circumstance and respond appropriately to different people, situations, cultures, or environment,	being effective when facing unusual or unexpected demands,	, Building partnerships- identifying, developing, and maintaining lasting business partnership with individuals, that can provide the organization with enhanced capabilities, costs efficiencies or expertise,
Meeting setting objectives,	Conceptual skills, Meeting by objectives (start with the end in mind),	Organisation behaviour,	, Change management- facilitating the acceptance and successful implementation of new process, reviewing and appraising the work of others, providing performance feedback (set and review	Persuasion/ influencing- using effective interpersonal strategies to change opinions, guide action or affect the emotions of others	Objectivity, Highly ethical

			performance standards),		
Translates and anchors business strategy into goals and daily practices of individuals and teams to shape the desired performance culture and drive sustainable results,	Communication- clearly conveying and receiving messages to meet the needs of all (verbally and written), resource management, ,	Personality must suit the occupation one want	HR service delivery, , interpersonal skills,	Salary and wage reviews,	Business partner,
negotiation skills, highly ethical	Job analysis	Chronic illness	Employee engagement,	simultaneously incorporates the long term picture and short term view to make decisions that balance risks and returns,	HR compliance, Personnel management,
Strategic influence,	strategic thinking,	HR service delivery	Handling people with disabilities,	psychological contract balance	Job analysis,

In the identification of HR competencies, it can be noted that practitioners did not limit themselves as competency models do. Practitioners noted that as HR is professionalising, there is a need to adopt a more detailed framework which is compatible with those within the profession and those for who are willing to be HR practitioners.

What is interesting, however, is that senior practitioners in the public service (Noluthando, Lindelwa, Zizopho, Chan, Boly and Mpo) put more emphasis on the traditional HR competencies than on strategy. However, other practitioners gave testimony to their work shaping strategy within public sector organisations (Simon, Zizipho and John).

6.4.4 Implication for the HR profession

As observed in the study, careers can be traditional and this was most prevalent to practitioners who worked within the public sector as it seemed they were in their comfort zone. But of great importance, a sense of frustration was also observed as respondents deliberated on what success means. In the public sector, HR is known to focus on the traditional roles, but when it comes to implementing the new competencies and arrears of growth in HR such as strategy, practitioners said they faced a lot of resistance.

To note are the findings of Bird (1995) who stated that personality, unlike competencies, is not teachable. Education training is essential in the cementing of HR competency-based strategies (Gangani *et al.*, 2004). Globally, competency-based models are instrumental for HR practice (Timothy & Michael, 1999). Cohen (2015) identified the fallacy of strategic HRM as there is a lack of consensus on its impact or influence. As found in the study, HR being strategic was a key element as contribution to strategy was identified as instrumental in the meaning of career

success. Recognition of practitioners was aligned to the strategic contributions in the organisation.

Employers view a tertiary qualification as proxy for acquiring a certain level of competency and minimum requirements for specific soft skills (Gunn, Bell, & Kafmann, 2010; Lowden, Hall, Elliot & Lewin, 2011). From the study, the HR degree is of value as HR is no longer a dumping site and it contains the basic competencies essential for employability to career success in the sector.

Hodges and Burchell (2003) noted that there is a shortfall in literature regarding employers' perceptions of employability. As senior HR practitioners represent the employer, the study has brought out their perceptions on employability and employability in HR.

In criticism of the SABPP competency model, practitioners identified its focus on competencies, rather than including capabilities. In the study the definition of competencies and capabilities was rather slim. In defining competencies, practitioners opted for a holistic orientation, which includes the knowledge behaviours and other personal attributes. Personal attributes are not only essential for employability, but drive one to success (Clarke, 2017; Harun *et al.*, 2017; Hayes *et al.*, 2016; Lim *et al.*, 2016; Pool, 2017; Wang, *et al.*, 2016). Similar to Harun *et al.* (2017), the critical skills and attributes required by employees are crucial for satisfaction. Thus employability becomes more than just a set of technical competencies required by employers. This was evident in the level of satisfaction of the graduates who have been employed.

Practitioners also gave their opinion on the study variables. What was most consistent was the value of competencies for professionalisation. Practitioners were excited about the identification of the explicit factors which are specific to HR.

They also expressed their doubt about how HR will achieve professionalisation in South Africa as there are practitioners who are not buying the agenda and the dumping philosophy is continuing regardless of the strides being made. The identification of employability competencies or soft skills which are unique to HR is not ground-breaking per se but is a starting point. The discussion of the study variables independently was warranted as clustering them to the new definition of employability would lead to the same fallacy which is created by the SABPP competency model as it does not distinguish what is for entry level and what is for progression.

Practitioners also encouraged more studies which try to fill the gap between academic and the world of work. However, achieving this was close to impossible as there is a concept of the high school friend mentality. When individuals meet their friends from high school, they talk of how good it is to meet and they must keep in touch for the greater good. But as soon as they walk away, that's where it ends. This is a challenge as there seems to be no follow up. At hand practitioners and academics might agree but the follow up is challenging as pride and organisational commitments may hinder progress.

Practitioners also gave an overview of their perceptions regarding the type of institution one comes from. It is essential to note that employability-wise, graduates who enrol for degrees such as B Com are at a disadvantage in the first few months of employment as their qualifications are too theoretical and they will only be able to make use of the theory as they acquire more experience. This is so as what they have learnt will only come into effect two years or more after their first job. Graduates from universities of technology are well equipped to meet the employer needs as their curriculum is structured along the quick adjustment to the workplace along these lines

Practitioners also identified a worrying trend which is growing – graduates from certain universities regardless of marks were deemed unemployable as their institutions are producing questionable talent. Names of such universities were mentioned. Practitioners proffered that the trainability of a candidate can be predicted by the marks they get in their majors (major subjects). In context, graduates who get below 65% in their majors were deemed unemployable as it will cost organisations more to hire such people. Arguably the same criteria is used by some academic institutions in recruiting students for higher qualification. From this standpoint it can be argued that the mark is a reflection of trainability and on how one can grasp complex issues. Such candidates as alluded by Penny require more resources for training and in the current knowledge-driven economies this puts such candidates at a disadvantage.

Practitioners noted that graduates were too raw when they come to work, some come with unrealistic expectations of the world of work. Teaching work readiness skills or employability skills prior to graduation will better equip learners to adjust in organisations. This will then reduce the impact of the culture shock. Another challenge which employers identified from lack of awareness of employer expectations is the great sense of entitlement and 'know it all' syndrome which fresh job seekers come with. They want to put to practice what they have

learnt instantly rather than be patient and be groomed and then progress once they have mastered the basics of the profession.

From the study a new question arose. Can HR professionalisation be attained? From practitioner reflections, the answer is 'yes' but as I collected data I observed a few challenges. The first was the presence of two professional bodies recognised by SAQA. To add to this, during data collection I came across a pool of practitioners who did not belong to either professional body and did not see the need for joining one. Some practitioners only joined professional bodies when they required promotion and this has nothing to do with furthering the mandate of HR in the workplace. Some practitioners were not even aware of the professional body and in our discussion I informed them of the SABPP as the body which can help them in handling bottlenecks they face as the challenges HR practitioners face seem to be uniform. The need for recognition which is a stumbling block for HR career success was identified in the study (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011).

In South Africa, the SABPP is making steady progress towards HR professionalisation. The HR competency model, HR standards, and the code of ethics are all key elements to the professionalisation of HR. What is needed, is a buy-in from all the practitioners. As observed, when HR speaks with one voice its stumbling blocks can be reduced. HR professionalisation in South Africa is following the five stages of professionalisation of Van Rensburg *et al.* (2011)

From the study, I observed that there is a disjointed relationship between employers, practitioners and academics. The arguments stemming from above clearly show that the concept of meritocracy is from which those who perform. Academics focus on the throughput rate and universities seem to be engaging in mass production rather than focusing on the quality of graduates. Arguably, in the current environment in which the demand for tertiary education has increased the focus is on quantity.

The theory of Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden's (2006) competence-based employability model is linked to the resource-based view as it focus is on competencies. Similar to Fugate and Kinicki's Disposal Model of Employability, this model does not only consider adaptive behaviour and employability but contains personal characteristics including personality, attitudes, and ability.

Employers believe that the mandate for employability and equipping graduates with skills is their prerogative and academics must teach the basics. This explains why one can practice in certain fields based on experience.

The gap between practitioners is further increased as in most cases, new job entrants at first occupy portfolios which have relatively nothing to do with what they have learnt. Craig cemented this by noting that new graduates work as personal assistants making photocopies and delivering tea. There is insufficient literature which documents the need for HR's evolution to the boardroom (Angrave, *et al.*, 2016; Boudreau, 2014; Selmer & Chiu, 2004)

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a discussion of the study findings in relation to literature. The following chapter outlines the contribution of the study, and theoretical and practice implications.



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CHAPTER 7

CONTRIBUTION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Based on the findings of the study, this chapter outlines the contribution of the study. The contribution of the study is based on creating a framework for sector-specific employability within the HR profession. HR competencies are key to employability and career success within the profession. The contribution will also be broken down along the stakeholders and constructs. The study was able to identify factors which make one unemployable and the area of dissatisfaction of HR practitioners.

7.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO HR EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER SUCCESS

The merits of the qualitative orientation is the freedom of participants to speak on the study variables. This enabled the researcher to identify factors which lead to one being unemployable. These factors were: *Lack of work experience, Lack of jobs, Expectations of the world of work, Flooded market and No right qualification for HR* profession. These factors are illustrated in Figure 7.1 below. These findings justify the need to teach employability and make graduates better work ready – else such practitioners are less likely to project career satisfaction.

Regarding sector-specific employability, the study identified traits which make one employable and cause career dissatisfaction among HR practitioners.

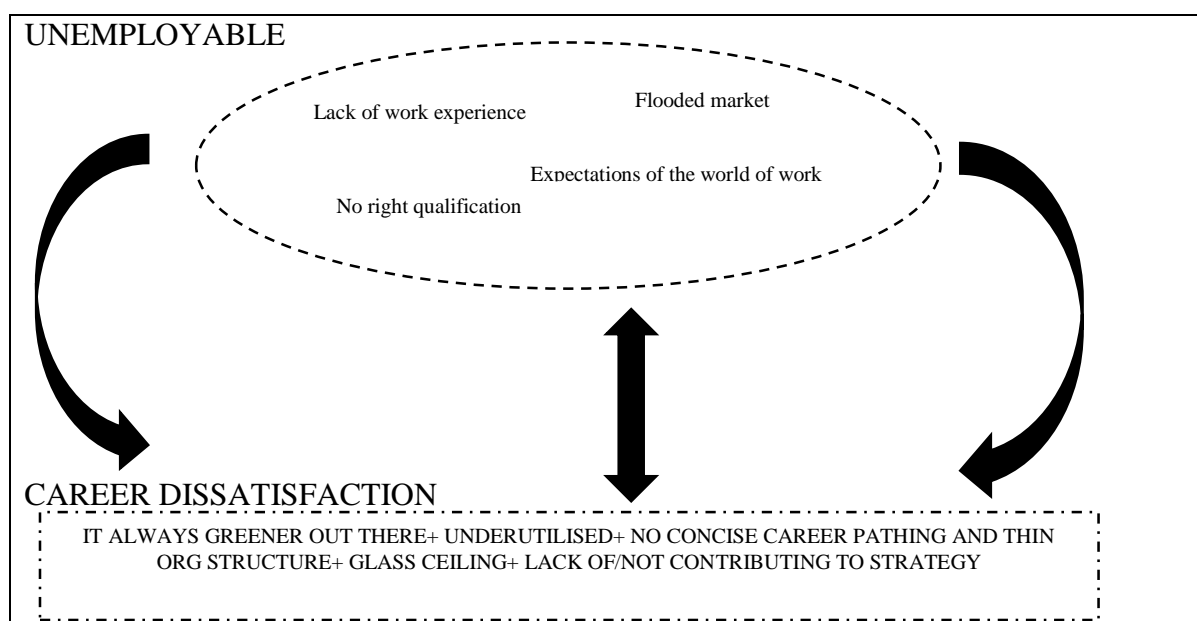
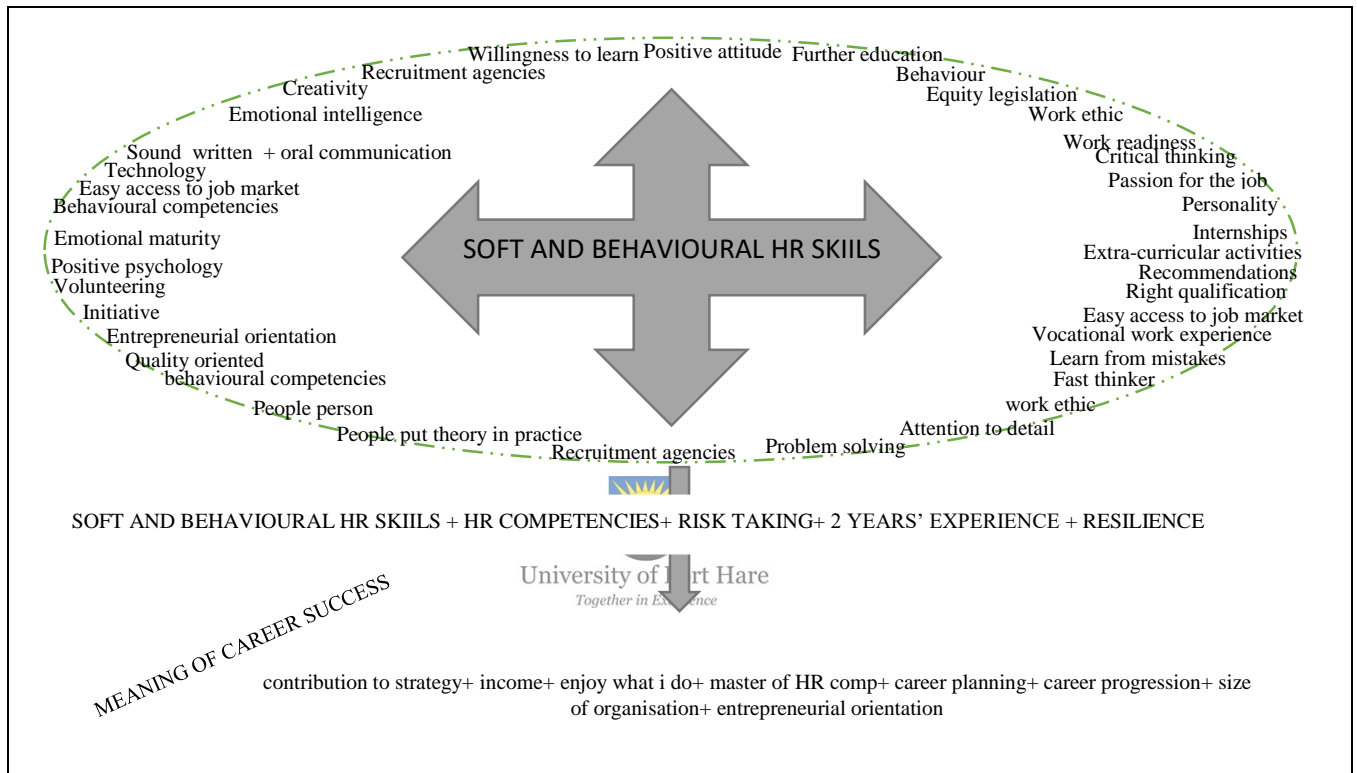


Figure 7.1: Career dissatisfaction and unemployable framework

In line with professionalisation, the study has identified how HR in South Africa is moving along the path of professionalisation. This is with hurdles and challenges but the path to professionalisation is trackable. Figure 7.2 below outlines the employability to career success framework.

HR EMPLOYABILITY TO CAREER SUCCESS FRAMEWORK



7.2: HR employability and career success framework

The study has outlined the growing need for sector-specific employability as occupations are leaving their traditional scopes to be professional occupations. The HR employability and career success meet the shortcoming in literature regarding the lack of HR employability literature. As HR strives to be strategic, there is a growing need to ensure that HR education produces graduates with the technical, strategic and behavioural competencies who can take the profession further.

With the self-determination theory and theory of planned behaviour, joining the profession is voluntary and there must be intention by an individual. This also gives foundation and the justification of passion and other key behavioural attributes. It is evident from the study, becoming an HR practitioner does not stop with acquiring a skill, but goes further by mastering it till one retires.

Linking Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2 will support the need for universities to have a module to better prepare graduates for the world of work. Figure 7.1 outlines factors which make one unemployable in spite of an academic qualification. Although universities have no control over the employment market, they can better prepare graduates for the world of work. The areas of career dissatisfaction also identify the HR stumbling blocks and informs those within the profession and those who want to join on how they can better prepare themselves.

Figure 7.3 – on the road to HR employability – introduces access as having all the skills in the current climate. However, this does not guarantee employment. The study also offers entrepreneurial orientation as a viable means, thus adding to the growing need for educational curriculums to cater for entrepreneurship. As HR is moving to professionalisation, opportunities arise for entrepreneurship and subject matter experts to drive the profession forward.

The framework identifies how skills such as ethics are not only essential for employability, but must follow through to career success. Volunteering, resilience, a positive attitude, internships employability pass mark and theory from the academic qualification are essential as HR is still facing legitimacy challenges. The skill of lifelong learning means one can further acquire and develop within HR from experience, training and education.



The need to align occupation along personality involves love for the profession because if there is no heart for the profession, the love for it will burn out in the long run.

The study also identified that employers deem those who attain the employability pass mark to be more employable. In essence, graduates who do not get the 65% are not trainable and are highly unlikely to succeed in the HR profession. In not being trainable, the study also found that some of the historically disadvantaged universities are producing graduates who are not trainable in HR. This also was not limited to these institutions. The new graduate is less willing to learn and has a greater sense of entitlement. They believe that at entry level they are worth more due to what they have learnt.

From Figure 7.3 it is clear that access to HR talks to the unpredictable nature of employability as it is not guaranteed. The study recommends that a door be added to the SABPP competency model to represent access to the workplace. This access talks to opportunities. The Pool and Sewell Model on career edge needs to be incorporated and modified to suit HR. In South Africa, those from a disadvantaged environment are also at a disadvantage. The environment is a factor which hinders employability and career success. The doors level the playing field as all willing

to be in HR regardless of academic institution will have obtained a qualification certified by a professional body, thus putting every student at par.

7.3 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study, from the theories has been able to identify the factors essential for HR employability grounded by models of employability. In the study, practitioners identified the factors of the employability models and they were key to career success. Instead of focusing on the knowledge areas covered by the HR syllabus, in employability to career success the individual characteristics were personality, emotional intelligence, self-evaluation, adaptive behaviours, attitudes and abilities, and resilience. Most competency models in HR seem to ignore these factors. These factors likewise determine whether one fails or succeeds in the HR profession.

The resource-based view, functionalist perspective on education and the conflict theory were the core theories grounding the study. Under employability, the key models in employability literature were identified and discussed; the same pertains to career success as the researcher started from boundaryless to protean career then moved to the career construction theory. The context of all these theories and models was explained clearly. With markets that are flooded and mass production of graduates and an increasing youth unemployment rate, from the themes which emerged, being entrepreneurial makes one employable. When one is laid off/ retrenched, being one's own boss and creating employment for others becomes a viable measure. Complemented with resilience and innovation, the study findings further enhance the merits of positive psychology in challenging times.

The study affirms Parsons' view on the role of university education which is a prerequisite for participation in the social system. The study identified that for one to practice in HR, an HR related qualification is the stepping stone. The process of socialisation, skills provision and role allocation are the main roles for education. An HR qualification equips and empowers one with the skills required for the roles in an HR career. The provision of skills in the sense of the study refers to employability skills and the theory from an HR qualification. Practitioners' opinions agreed with the work of Parsons in that in participating in HR, have an HR qualification as proxy.

Using Parsons' (1951) concept of meritocracy, the study confirms that when one has the right qualification for a profession one will be rewarded. The study identified the employability pass mark. In line with meritocracy, those who get above the 65% mark are more employable and trainable and thus are rewarded. In line with this, career progression is linked to academic

qualifications. However, as HR is professionalisation, higher qualifications do not necessarily mean one occupies a senior position. This can be observed from the criteria used by the professional body as experience takes precedence in the allocation of descriptors. To be a chartered HR practitioner, tenure on position and who you interact with determines your position.

In contrast to this point of view, conflict theorists do not agree with the functionalist ideology of meritocracy, education does not provide a level playing field. This is observable in the South African system which was characterised by imbalances and those who had the means of production and of the favoured race that rose up the hierarchy. The time it takes people to acquire a first job can be an indicator. The race and location of participants who took more than six months to get their first job and attributed it to the environment. Contrary to this one's environment can act as a motivator to move up the hierarchy. Background cannot determine where one goes. To cement conflict theorist sentiments, practitioners in the study identified some universities which were producing graduates which were too raw for the labour market. These universities had one characteristic in common, they were all historically disadvantaged. However, as a comforting factor, there was a general dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates most universities are producing.



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Adding to the conflict perspective, background and networking enhance one's employability and this subscribes to the conflict notion of employers hiring one with a similar background as theirs. In employability one can be overlooked due to the background, this was alluded to by Jane who identified graduates from a certain university as unemployable. This notion was supported by Penny who purported that graduates with less than 65% in their majors are unemployable as it is a sign that they have not mastered the core content of their profession. Such graduates are difficult to train. This then cements the Marxian notion of education reproducing inequality as those who passed the majors will then be overlooked as employers are strongly moving in this direction. To elaborate on the conflict perspective, individuals who were being hindered by legislation to progress in their careers were presumed to have been beneficiaries of the previous social dispensation and race was the descriptor.

Positional conflict theory has also been outlined in the belief that it offers a promising way of bringing together contrasting theories of education, employment and the labour market. Employers also justify one to be employable or not depending on their requirements in a dynamic business environment.

The Fugate and Kinicke Disposal Model of Employability identified adapting to the work environment, openness to changes at work, work and career resilience, work and career proactivity, career motivation, social and human capital, and career identity. In the study, resilience amongst HR practitioners was identified as the major trait essential as the HR environment was characterised by numerous pitfalls and those who were resilient were more likely to be successful. Also as HR is not respected in some organisations, resilience made practitioners continue with their quest and focus on what is important for them. With resilience giving up is never an option. The SABPP competency model also identified career identity, as observed these traits are not only for employability in the interim but, employability to career success. Thus, the identified traits can be used at any point of one's career.

Careers are boundaryless as practitioners had to apply for external jobs to move up the hierarchy. In the study it was observed that traditional careers still exist but higher up the hierarchy there are fewer senior HR positions occupied by incumbents with a high life expectancy. In order to progress, prospects for promotion were found from outside/ other organisations. There is less attachment to the organisation than to one's career advancement; attachment is to one's professional affiliation.



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From the theory of work adjustment, skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours are the key attributes which drive effective performance in HR. The study findings support this theory as one performs well only after one makes use of their full potential. The theory adopts a person fit work environment. This point was deliberated upon by practitioners as they cemented passion for the profession as a key attribute for effectiveness in HR. With the changes which have taken place in HR, practitioners have had to adjust their skills, knowledge, experience, attitude, behaviours to suit the direction the profession is taking. From this theory those that embrace such changes have greater prospects of attaining success in the profession.

The career construction theory looks at the subjective experiences as one develops in the profession. In line with professionalisation, a collective experience was determined in finding the meaning of career success. In the study, not making use of skills or not being recognised were areas of discontent among practitioners. These collective subjective traits allow HR in its own language to infer meaning to the employability and career success competencies. Practitioners also used the theory to describe a journey of their employability and how they got to where they were, by identifying the most critical competencies.

7.4 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

7.4.1 To HR graduates

HR degrees are there to serve as a foundation for professionals to build as they acquire work experience and continue professional development activities. The study further justifies the role of HR qualifications not only as determinants of employability, but career success as one will be required to put theory into practice.



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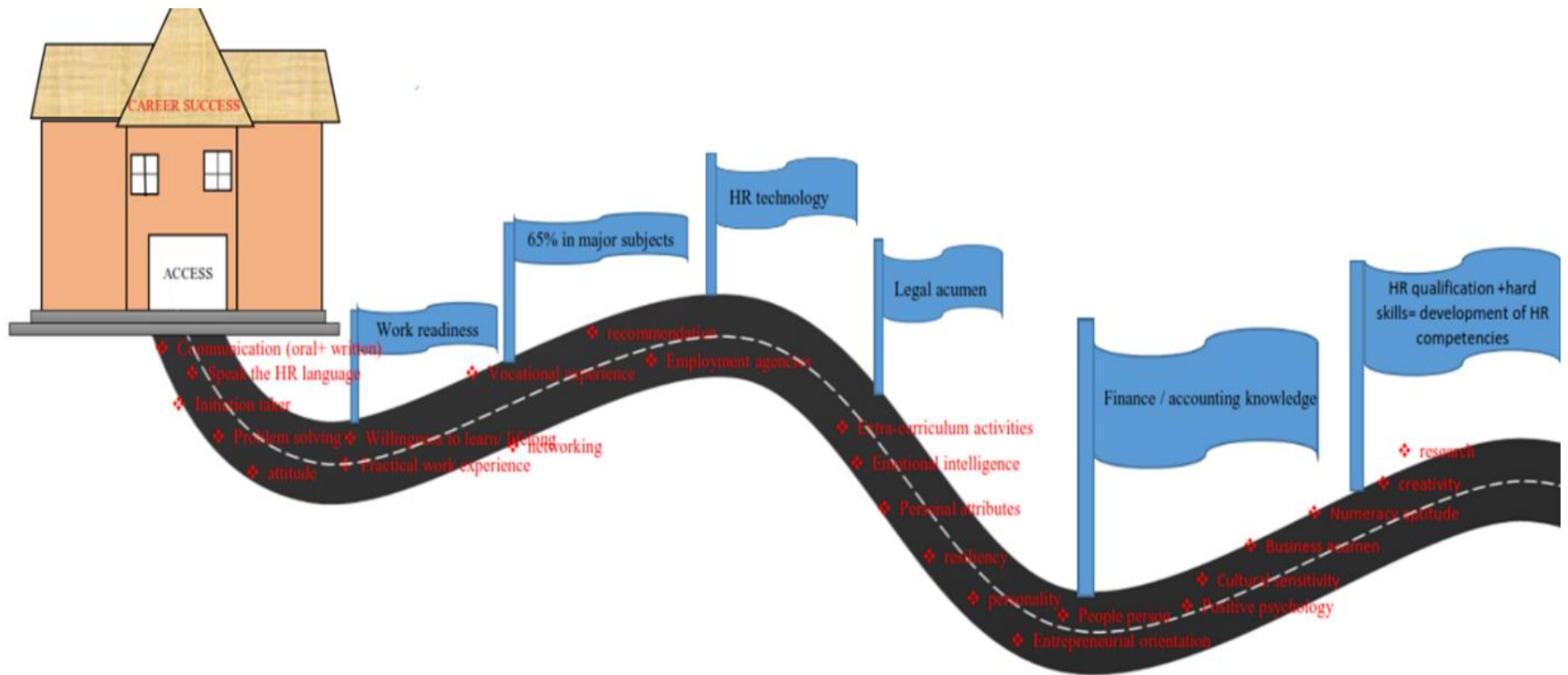




Figure 7.3: The journey to HR employability

The study did not explicitly find the influence of educational qualifications to career success and more areas of argument can come out; the need for an academic qualification as a catalyst to employability and career success was found. This is so as from the professional body any HR qualification ranging from a diploma and coupled with experience is sufficient to take one to the top. In the current knowledge-driven economies, this is a source of conflict which practitioners identified as new job entrants can come with a masters and no experience and expect to assume leadership duties. The solution is to follow the accounting path or medicine in which there must be board exams so as to assume leadership roles. Board exams are not new as the first exam was written in 1990 in South Africa (Van Rensburg, et al 2011). However, what came out was the value of an HR qualification in aiding one to move up the hierarchy. From this standpoint, senior practitioners with no HR background will find it difficult to execute their duties as they lack the theoretical foundations of the discipline.

The study cements growing interest in the infusion of entrepreneurship into education curriculum (Benneworth, 2016; El-Gohary *et al.*, 2016; Siivonen, & Isopahkala-Bouret, 2016; Smith, *et al.*, 2017). As the world of work becomes more complex economies require more entrepreneurs, and employees can be  future employers. The study identified that entrepreneurial traits enhanced employability and success in line with literature (Bell, 2016; Huq *et al.*, 2017; Misra, & Mishra, 2016).  University of Fort Hare
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Enhancement of employability globally and the absorption of graduates by employers is a key priority. There is however paucity when it comes to sector specific employability. In the drive to making HR a profession and sector specific employability the study serves as a foundation to achieving HR employability. A foundation for numerous avenues for future research has been highlighted as there is less attention being paid to sector-specific employability (profession).

The study contributes to the value/classification of competencies in HR as we move to sector specific employability and the professionalisation of HR. Practitioners were able to classify the competencies and attributes which make one employable. As identified in literature, text on HR competencies revolves around change agent, strategy, technology, and generally ignores the behaviours which are complementary.

The literature chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) were guided by theories of each attribute. I took this step so as to link practitioners' experiences with theory and cater for the lack of sufficient literature. A sound theoretical backing was given to the experiences of practitioners and I also wanted to give meaning; 'collective meaning' to HR employability and career success guided by the SABPP HR competency model.

It was also observed that not all practitioners are aware of the professional body and the work it does. More still needs to be done in order for HR in South Africa to speak with one voice. Additionally, the study identified that a review of the current HR competency model is due as it is reaching five years and is the complex challenges HR is facing.

Competency models are being introduced focusing on the end product which is an efficient workforce, thus ignoring the human attributes and the future practitioner who will join the profession. Defining employability and competency modelling will always face shortcomings as long as the human attributes are ignored.

For HR to be recognised as a profession will not just happen. Practitioners at all levels must make it happen, from entry level to senior position – by enforcing the use of competencies as benchmarks and sticking to the code of ethics.



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The drive towards sector-specific employability and professionalisation of HR studies like this one are becoming instrumental in giving direction to the profession. South Africa is leading as SABPP has set benchmarks which the rest of developed and developing world is following. However, from the study it appears that the trends being set by the professional body do not necessarily trickle down to those in the profession.

According to the study, the RBV identifies the skills and dispositions which are required to make HR strategic, thus achieving its competitive advantage. Respondents in the study mostly agreed on the SABPP competency model as the toll essential to guide HR to the boardroom. Personal attributes, personality, resilience and sector specific knowledge are the intangible resources at the disposal of one taking a career in HR and are not explicitly stated by the SABPP competency model. These skills and dispositions arguably are not imitable and unique to HR professionalisation (Dunford, Snell, & Wright 2001; Olalla, 1991).

The study found that HR is no longer a dumping zone for professionals who have not made the cut in their respective departments. Professionals who do not have an HR qualification or background will need to acquire such. In the case of someone who was a social worker and justified their career shift due to a passion for working with people, they went on further to acquire qualifications which are HR-related. This cements the value of HR degrees.

As HR is professionalising, the language it speaks is becoming complex, as HR standards and the competency models comprise lingo/jargon which is sector specific. The SABPP competency model thus serves as a benchmark in HR professionalisation. The contribution to literature is in sector-specific employability, and empirically assessing the relevance of the SABPP competency model in South Africa, the study further cements the challenges identified from literature in attaining sector-specific employability.

According to literature, HR professionals are routinely criticised for not adding value to the organisation and failing to speak the language of business. The study identified that accounting and finance for HR managers are key modules which HR practitioners must equip themselves with. One of the greatest challenges HR is facing is the multiple areas of specialisation. However, those that become strategic business partners are expected to be masters of the areas of specialisation. Were in their comfort zone and were not willing to move up. The researcher is mindful that there are numerous avenues valuable for HR practitioners. The study further justifies the significance of an HR qualification as it is not only essential for entry level HR positions, but senior positions too. A sound HR qualification must possess all the components highlighted in the competency model as the knowledge is crucial as one progresses.

From the study it was observed that a higher education qualification does not necessarily mean that one will progress up the hierarchy. The driving factor behind employability is the assumption that the economic welfare of people and nations' competitive advantage is reliant on knowledge, skills and the enterprise of employees (Brown, *et al.*, 2003). Employees are responsible for their own employability and higher education must serve the purpose of equipping graduates with career management skills (Mintena, & Forsyth, 2014). Defining employability takes an employer orientation (Bridgstock, 2009) as they are the ones who make use of the skills.

The building of a profession starts with a relevant qualification compulsory at entry level. The qualification serves as the foundation of knowledge, competencies and behaviours. According to literature, the personal attributes which are relevant to professions are often overlooked as researchers tend to focus on the core competencies and behaviours. For HR resilience, a passion to work with people, and a love for the profession have been identified as key to HR development. From positive psychology, resilience has been identified as a key attribute required by HR practitioners, As practitioners fight to be in the boardroom, and conduct their conflicting yet essential roles they must be resilient in order to be strategic. As observed from the study, practitioners who were more satisfied with the profession were those who sit in the boardroom table (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Luthans, *et al.*, 2007; Luthans, *et al.*, 2006).

According Luthans et al. (2007), resilient individuals are those who reverse pressure into motive and do not conform to setbacks. They study new knowledge actively and creativity to improve ability to recover (Keen *et al.*, 2012). Regardless of risk and adversity, one who exudes resilience always seeks a positive outcome.

Over and above the role of traditional and modern HR competencies, not only employability skills were identified to be crucial to HR employability but personal attributes which are key in determining future behaviours within HR and determine whether one succeeds within the profession.



The professionalisation of HR is making inroads in South Africa. The work of the SABPP has not been received by all practitioners. Not all individuals in the profession are aware of the strides it is making in South Africa to professionalise HR. The study has also given meaning to themes under the career success constructs. Attributes which accelerate practitioners in their career were also identified. The competency model was criticised for being reactive rather than pro-practice. Perceptions of employees on the fairness and relevance of competency models have a positive influence on the outcomes of employability (Serima *et al.*, 2014). Irrespective of occupation, employers require interpersonal relations, adaptability and negotiation skills (Martín, 2014). Breen et al. (2004), conducted a longitudinal study of internships in developing competencies essential for employability amongst tourism graduates. Their findings revealed that the curriculum must include management competence so as to prepare learners for the

future roles they will lay. From this perspective, graduates must know all the essential competencies of a profession to prepare them better for the future roles.

7.4.2 Contribution to the competency model

From the preceding discussion, the study has been able to identify the traits which are critical to HR and what is required to begin a journey in HR. The next step is to contribute to the SABPP competency model. In making the contribution it is befitting to move to the definition of competencies. From the sentiments of the practitioners, the weakness of the competency model is its failure to highlight the key attributes essential for effective performance in HR. The redefined definition in the study takes into consideration capabilities and personal characteristics. It further takes into consideration the South African context in which legislation redresses the imbalances of the past.

The researcher, in making the contribution, is mindful of the fact that refined models are limited and tend to focus on the essential competencies. In the case of South Africa, it is wise to move to the refined model yet most practitioners and new entrance have mastered the traditional competencies. From this I argue that the SABPP model should move back a bit to ensure practitioners are aware of what is required from them. The refined model also ignores attributes key for effective performance. Figure 5.8 has identified the key competencies required for HR in South Africa. Based on Figure 5.8, HR then needs to focus on the foundational basics as this then allows one to understand the basics of the profession so that HR can be linked with all key aspects of organisations.

The intention thus is to better prepare oneself for effective performance. The integration and aligning of behaviours, human attributes and personal characteristics arguably better prepare one for HR. The proposed HR system will make HR aware of its weaknesses and better position itself to the direction the profession is taking.

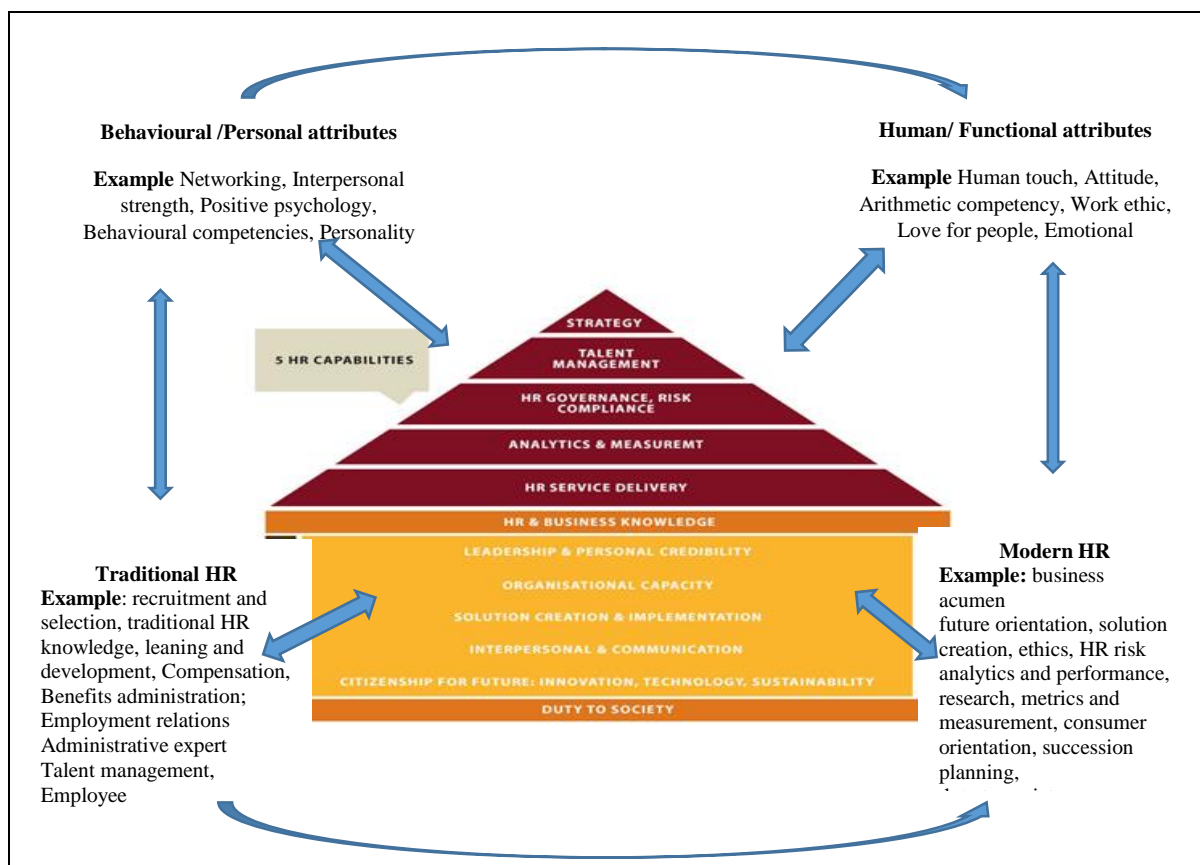


Figure 7.4: The HR system



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The first contribution is the addition of the door in Figure 7.3 which represents access and takes into consideration meritocracy in which those who are academically deserving being given priority. The HR system serves as an enabler for HR to identify what is key and not overlooking the traditional characteristics such as the human touch which is also key for the profession. HR must go beyond its mandate as the environment is turbulent and constantly changing.

7.4.3 To stakeholders (practitioner, state, professional body and university)

Practitioners clarified that what one learns in university will only come to use as one gains experience. The way most diplomas and degrees of technology are structured they enable one to acquire work readiness skills as they have mandatory internships. According to finding of the study, the teaching of work readiness especially to degreed candidates is recommended in the last semester. Most graduates fail not because of incompetence but due to the culture shock and failure to adjust and they are not work ready. Teaching work readiness skills for HR will better equip learners. The study also adds to the debate on HR qualifications – the study has

highlighted that HR is generally stronger in the long run in employability skills and that the graduates with B Comm rather than degrees in technology and diplomas are at a disadvantage due to the structure of the curriculum. The curriculum is too theoretically inclined. Theoretical foundations are valid in the workplace as one assumes responsibilities. A review exists of the curriculum on encouraging internships to better inform new graduates on the requirements of their selected professions.

Findings in the study are consistent with previous research regarding practitioners possessing a set of required competencies. As observed, most practitioners were not able to exercise their duties in contributing to strategy. Regardless of one being competent or not most practitioners were still not able to contribute to strategy and as practitioners they failed to execute the new set of competencies (Ramlall, 2006). Yeung et al. (1996) stated that 10-35% of practitioners possess the new set of competencies. In light of the findings, change is a norm at the workplace (Shafie & Asmaak 2010). The researcher recommends continuous engagement between the stakeholders as so as to ensure practitioners are better equipped to take HR to strategic positions. As this study is no exception, research begets research.

The implications of the study are synonymous to universities and the HR curriculum, the professional body and the future HR professional. HR graduate employability links labour market requirements to higher education and higher education offers HR degrees for candidates who are willing to work in HR.



7.5.1 Recommendations of findings to the HR profession

From the study, it was observed that although HR is on the right track in South Africa, it was not recognised and was not yet accorded a seat to the boardroom. The strides HR is taking in South Africa are in line with global trends. However, inequality within the South African demographics pose a great challenge for the profession, as the mandate of redressing the imbalances of the past is the mandate of HR. In addressing the imbalances, as observed, some positions within organisations were reserved as equity positions and this greatly affected the career success of those in such position. One can act in a position and yet not be appointed due to equity.

In the current climate and with the challenges HR is facing it can be observed that board exams need to be reintroduced especially with the current employability challenges. Also in order for the HR profession to be taken seriously, tough measures have to be put in place as board exams will complement the academic qualification. To note, other professions such as the medical profession took several years to develop to their current levels of sophistication, and one thus needs reminding that HR management is a ‘fledgling’ profession.

7.5.2 Recommendations to the HR practitioner

From the above discussion, practitioners are advised to be resilient and benefit from the merits of positive psychology. The SABPP competency model provides a solid framework which aids practitioners to justify the place of HR in the boardroom. However, for the merits of the SABPP competency model, it has to be implemented in the workplace.

There is need for aggressive marketing of the competency model as it is relatively unknown by other practitioners. The 2012 model was a follow up to the Eskom HR competency model and this was news to most of the participants in the study.

There are gaps in literature on HR competency models and the SABPP competency model in South Africa. Redressing the imbalances of the past. The meaning of career success is contribution to strategy and efforts being recognised by other senior members.



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7.5.3 Recommendations to the universities

Universities must align their offer qualification in HR which is accredited by the professional body to ensure consistency within the discipline in South Africa. As indicated in the study, universities also have a mandate to introduce a module to teach new entrants into the job market employability skills, not only to better prepare them for the profession but to enhance the generic employability skills and better equip learners with the needs and requirements for the world of work.

Challenges were identified as some institutions were producing graduates who are not trainable, which brings to question what they have been taught at their respective institutions. The importance of the generic employability skills is due to the failure especially by new job seekers to adjust to new occupations.

7.5.4 Recommendations to the professional body

When the professional body was established, board exams were there to cater for the HR practitioners who lacked academic qualification (Van Rensburg, et al 2011). For professionalisation to take place, the professional body should begin the task of setting up board exams for competency for each level in HR. These exams will cater for the lack of a universal HR curriculum programme. As observed, to be an HR manager a diploma and experience will suffice. In other professions, the diploma is cemented by professional registration which is not based on subscriptions paid but which reflect the competency of an individual. As observed, HR is universal and thus organisations in South Africa can use the professional registration based on merit. This can also help the HR agenda to attain or command respect from other members who sit on the board.

There is need for the professional body to show the path from the Eskom competency model to the 2012 competency model. It is necessary to add personal characteristics to the model and to simplify the model as follows:

- Setting exams for final year students at universities.
- Categorisation must be based on competence by means of a competence exam, instead of considering experience alone. This will cement professionalisation as quality will be assured and set by the professional body.

However, the professional body is making strides in ensuring the HR dream is realised as there is a code of ethics and standards which have been set for the professions. These are important components of professionalisation. The professional body also has a lot of work to do so as to gain buy-in from all if not most of the practitioners in South Africa. When HR fails to obtain buy-in from its own practitioners, then how can professionalisation be attained?

From the study, it was observed that a detailed version of the model is available only to practitioners who are members. These members have to purchase the model, which can be a reason why some members professed ignorance. The SABPP competency model is a sound framework and provides greater detail than other models which have existed before its introduction. The competency model sets the right foundation for the HR journey.

7.5.5 Recommendations for graduates

For employability within HR, the HR qualification is the golden ticket for entering the profession. However, one must have the employability pass mark as practitioners linked the mark to be a reflection of one's trainability – this is somewhat echoed by Ju, et al. (2012); Rosales (2014); and Spill (2002). Graduates must enrol for qualification if they have a heart (passion) for the profession.

Sixty-five percent is regarded as the employability pass mark, this mark reflects on the trainability of candidates. Employability skills must be developed at an early stage. Thus, it is beneficial to volunteer for work at an early stage not only for networking, but in the development of soft skills and business acumen. Hillage and Polard (1998) and Granda-Piñán et al. (2014) shared the sentiment of early development of employability skills. Soft skills are key to employability.

Graduates must also be able to put theory into practice. In the process of learning what is required in the profession they are advised to be patient for it can take up to two years to put the knowledge that they acquired into practice.

The competencies identified can be of use to the professional body. Candidates registered in the student chapter can make use of the identified competencies and study findings to introspect on whether they have made the right career choice.

With the lack of role modules in some communities, stories/narratives of one's experience in a profession can serve as career guidance. These findings are instrumental in the development of the work readiness module which must be introduced. In the case of the study, the module focused on the traits identified to better prepare one for a career in HR.

7.6 SYNTHESIS

Ethics in HRM is becoming a compulsory experience for learners and the onus is on the student to make sense of the value of what is taught to them. This can be setting up learners for failure especially when they fail to meet the set expectations (Costea, *et al.*, 2012). McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) in their study presented a framework for employability centred on the individual characteristics, personal circumstances, and external factors which consider supply-

and demand-side variables. Regarding what must be added to the curriculum, teaching employability and entrepreneurship are key for employability.

However, with experience and time knowledge of accounting/budgeting, project management, more emphasis should be placed on strategy, ethics and accountability. Findings are a stepping stone to HR employability and career success. The findings also deconstruct the HR competencies and their relevance in South Africa. HR is ceasing to be the dumping ground for failed practitioners. The way forward in the professionalisation of HR lies in certification. Although certification does guarantee competence of one being strategic, it also ensures continuous learning and professional development.

From conducting interviews and acquiring the experiences of professionals, I now believe there is a need to build assessments in the HR profession at all levels from entry level. Better still, final year graduates should write an exam can set by the professional body as this will also ensure that what is taught for HR is relevant to the HR context. This sentiment is shared in Cohen (2015) who advocated the need for assessments at all levels within the HR profession.

This in turn, although not guaranteed, should ensure employability as those who perform will have mastered the basics in the profession and are likely to last longer as they will have completed the entry level competence test. Those who seek promotion will need to apply to write an exam in line with the stage they wish to occupy. This is when HR begins to take itself more seriously.

However, during discussion with practitioners it transpired that not everyone has met the criteria set for the study. There seems to be some fear regarding being examined as failure may be linked to incompetence. This was also observed from participants who stated they were content with the positions they occupy and were not willing to move up the hierarchy.

7.7 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

When competency models are being crafted they fail to take into account the role of individual attributes which are crucial for employability and success. The aim of the study was to provide context- based knowledge on the HR competencies for employability and career success. Themes were used to use practitioners' experiences in the crafting of traits which are essential

for employability within HR. The use of open-ended questions provided a comprehensive and holistic approach which is practical in identifying and understanding the themes in employability and career success. Meaning was deducted without the researcher making any pre-conceived assumptions.

The qualitative approach is an effective approach to identify competencies for employability and career success. Thematic analysis also enabled participants to deliberate on the impact of the SABPP competency model. In South Africa and globally, literature on competency models exists and the value of HR in organisations is being acknowledged. HR on its own in South Africa has embarked on the professionalising agenda, thus setting the trend. HR qualification are now a necessity for anyone who wants to embark in the profession; however, a qualification alone does not guarantee employability, even less success. The study offers traits which can cement the HR qualification and eventually lead to success. Positive psychology, resilience and one's personality are critical characteristics which have been identified among others to elevate one from being employed and to make a meaningful contribution to a profession. As the researcher, I am able to make such assertions after deriving them from the lived experiences of participants occupying senior positions within the profession.



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In the employability agenda, academics and universities are found wanting as they seem to be following trends which have been set by practitioners (Sin, Veiga & Amaral (2016). The gap between the exit level outcomes of a curriculum and the needs of the profession in the study's sense still needs to be closed. How these identified traits can be offered was proposed through the addition of work readiness as an independent module which targets the specific profession. Employability targets students before work begins (Costea *et al.*, 2012). From this standpoint, the researcher identified the competencies and behaviours crucial for employability in HR so as to inform students who wish to take a career in HR.

7.8 LIMITATIONS

Based on this research, some limitations can be suggested. The first limitation of the study is the bias of perceptions from collecting data from a single homogenous group, only HR practitioners. The researcher relied on the experiences of senior HR professionals to share their career journey and to validate the SABPP competency model. Insight from other senior

managers will be essential in identifying the shortcoming of HR at the boardroom table. Input from other practitioners occupying junior positions could have also catered for the changes in time as the employability environment has changed drastically.

The researcher observed the scarcity of literature pertaining to sector-specific employability. In the HR competency debate, Ulrich is the most cited author and his work sets the trends as observed from Chapter 5. There is a lack of qualitative data on the HR competencies nationally and internationally. As the study has interesting areas for future research for HR, the methodological limitations do provide an interesting direction for future research.

Practitioners who withdrew the study posed a limitation as their contribution to knowledge will not be known. Lack of funding was also a great challenge as it inhibited the data collection process. I was cautious to not privilege theory over the voices of my respondents in order to produce sound balance. The findings of the study are not generalisable to the entire South African context due to the methodology limitations employed in the study.

7.9 FUTURE RESEARCH

From the limitations of the study, the researcher derived the following directions for future research. A larger sample size can be used and instead of focusing on senior HR personnel alone, all professionals from entry level could be included as this will give more insight in identifying the constructs under investigation. Further, a concurrent mixed method approach can be used to allow rigorous statistical analysis to get association amongst the study constructs and explore the differences or similarities in opinions.

Future studies can also adopt the same qualitative orientation to interview top management or senior non-HR management on their expectations from their respective HR departments. This along with the findings in this study will give a clear insight into the challenges for HR and can better shape the HR professionalisation journey. This will cater for the challenge of HR 'blowing its own horn' loudly and yet still failing to have a commanding seat in the boardroom.

As identified in the study, in the public sector, dumping is still taking place as those who have failed in their respective areas of specialisation are still finding their way to HR leadership positions which in turn exacerbates the legitimacy of the profession. Further research in this

respect will help identify where HR is getting it wrong as we move to the professionalisation journey.

Future research can also be encouraged to increase the population size with input from more HR practitioners rather than focus only on the practitioners registered with the SABPP which will be more valuable for the profession. This can allow room for comparison on the uniformity challenges HR is facing and see who is getting it more right. A balance on all the segments of employment is also encouraged as this will also help in the identification of competencies which can be used to benchmark career progression.

7.10 CONCLUSION

From the study it can be noted that the challenges for HR to professionalise in South Africa appear to be much bigger than we realise. There is need for more empirical studies to thwart the challenges identified. As identified, what is key for effective performance within HR is not only the HR competencies, but functional abilities and personal attributes are the key attributes for effective performance which most competency models seem to overlook. What is key for HR is to ensure that entry level employees not only possess competencies but are also able to display the functional and personal attributes.



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The impact of the study is its ability to identify both the factors which make one employable and unemployable. The study also agrees with literature in the adopting lifelong learning to employability and thus end the continued failure to distinguish between employability and career success. The study also cements an HR qualification as key for entry to the profession.

In defining competency, the study has also adopted a holistic orientation to include personal characteristics and behaviours. The three study variables were discussed independently not to identify a relationship per se but to identify the drivers or main attributes of each. It was observed that some competencies if not most overlap from employability to career success.

The study also assessed the SABPP competency model and identified that it is applicable to practice in South Africa although the model has its shortcomings. In conclusion, the study contributes to sector-specific employability and career success in HR guided by the HR competencies in the professionalisation of HR in South Africa.

“it is easier to prepare for a profession when one has a clear idea of where they are going and getting themselves into.”



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CHAPTER 8

REFLECTION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, as the researcher I share my experiences in conducting the study. I reflect on the methodology adopted for the study, the journey of the PhD, the research conference and explore whether the journey was worth it.

8.2 REFLECTION

Conducting the study has been an invaluable life experience. I have learnt about the power of positive psychology in not giving up regardless of circumstances. The value of research, in this context applied research, is that I have been able to give back to the community for which the study was intended which is HR professionals.

In relation to methodology, I have learnt to categorise and use the appropriate methodology depending on the subject under investigation. The study has been eye-opening experience as it took me back to learn how stories can define a career and experience be used in directing a profession.



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The study has enabled me not only to network with senior HR personnel but this experience has also enhanced my people skills. Respondents who had a change of heart in the 11th hour made me experience the frustrations we read of in literature. Gathering the strength to finish from a personal tragic experience is a clear indication of the rewards of positive psychology and religion.

For the study, I inclined operating along an academic career orientation which has allowed me to introspect about what I teach, how I teach and when to teach it. This has had a positive effect on my own career and how I practice. Working the professional body and having meetings with the CEO, COO, head of research and quality assurance has made me identify the gap I seek to fill in all my future research projects. I have observed that in professionalisation the supply side (students) is always ignored and I seek to create a growing awareness of the effects of such

Sector-specific employability for HR is not a milestone but can be attained. South Africa seems to be leading globally in the professionalising of the HR profession and as a researcher it gives me a sense of pride and belonging to be contributing to the professionalisation of HR using competencies.

8.3 REFLECTION ON HR RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The professional body has made inroads in bridging the gap as the first research conference which brought academics and professionals together took place in July 2016. Partial findings of the study were presented to the stakeholders and from the feedback gathered, HR is moving in the right direction but there are still many challenges. A weakness identified by conference attendees was that when the professional body only works with members, only HR will be 'blowing its own horn' and this will make the journey to professionalisation even tougher.

8.4 REFLECTIONS OF METHODOLOGY

The study did not seek to assess a causal relationship; it was exploratory in nature and only investigated the experiences of practitioners to narrate their HR career journey. The target population comprised seasoned HR practitioners registered with the SABPP either as master or chartered HR practitioners. This was one of the main strengths of the study as participants who are moving with the changes taking place in the advancement of HR professionalisation were considered. The researcher did not seek for representativity, the unit of analysis for being selected was being a master or chartered practitioner. Practitioners were required to reflect on their career progression and identify the competencies which they attribute to their employability and career success and to assess the applicability of the competency model to the South African context.

As generalisability of the study findings was not established, more studies with a different methodology and that access the wider HR community in South Africa are needed. This will better uncover the state of HR employability, career success and HR competencies and will give greater insight into why some practitioners in South Africa are not buying into the professionalisation agenda. The homogenous nature (only HR personnel) of the target population and the consideration of only practitioners registered with the SABPP will seem as if HR is 'blowing its own horn' loudly.

8.5 WAS IT WORTH IT?

Routing for this qualification has been a worthwhile experience. From hustling for respondents with no funding and having to fly around South Africa just for one appointment has been a sound experience. It has been a good experience meeting different stakeholders within HR, the story of hope for a field trying to be recognised within organisations yet it is the engine of most organisations.

The greatest challenge came in meeting practitioners who were content with the status quo and were afraid of taking on more responsibilities. In my view, such practitioners justify why HR is not respected in some organisations. As HR we are our own enemy.

The study however opened doors for me as I was able to present in the first ever research in practice for HR in South Africa. Being called upon to present as a young academic and to be part of laying a solid foundation for HR has been quite an experience.

I know what it is like for someone to change their mind after incurring travelling expenses and then interview is cancelled. And I remember the words “Black man, you are on your own” playing in my head. However, working with high profile individuals comes with its own challenges.



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Giving up has never been an option as we have choices. At any stage, I will do it again and again. I love research, I love meeting people and sharing their experience and learning from their stories. As a growing academic, this also helps me to bridge the gap between practice and theory. With where education in Africa and South Africa is going, we need to create curricula which talk to the needs of our economies. Lack of passion is a disservice to the profession.

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Websites

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www.SABPP.ac.za

www.statssa.gov.za/



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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE REC-270710-028-RA Level 01

Certificate Reference Number: DOD091SHLA01

Project title: **HR competencies, employability and career success in South Africa**

Nature of Project: PhD

Principal Researcher: Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo

Supervisor: Dr NM Dodd
Co-supervisor: Prof R Elliot

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribed format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.

Special conditions: Research that includes children as per the official regulations of the act must take the following into account:

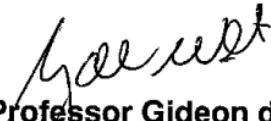
Note: The UREC is aware of the provisions of s71 of the National Health Act 61 of 2003 and the matters pertaining to obtaining the Minister's consent are under discussion and remain unresolved. Nonetheless, as was decided at a meeting between the National Health Research Ethics Committee and stakeholders on 6 June 2013, university ethics committees may continue to grant ethical clearance for research involving children without the Minister's consent, provided that the prescriptions of the previous rules have been met. This certificate is granted in terms of this agreement.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
 - Any unethical principal or practices are revealed or suspected
 - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented
 - Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require
 - The conditions contained in the Certificate have not been adhered to
- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course of the project.
- In addition to the need to comply with the highest level of ethical conduct principle investigators must report back annually as an evaluation and monitoring mechanism on the progress being made by the research. Such a report must be sent to the Dean of Research's office

The Ethics Committee wished you well in your research.

Yours sincerely


Professor Gideon de Wet
Dean of Research

23 September 2014

APPENDIX B: DEBRIEFING FORM



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DEBRIEFING FORM

My name is Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo and I am currently undertaking a PhD with the University of Fort Hare in South Africa. I would like to ask you to take part in my research study, but before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. The research is on *“Human Resources Competencies, Employability and Career Success in South Africa: Reflections of Senior Human Resource Practitioners.”* The research is solely for academic purposes and all information obtained will be kept in the strictness of confidence. Your name is not required and there is no right or wrong answer. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH?

The purpose of the study is to identify competencies that are essential for employability to career success in the career path of HR. The study will also assess the relevance of the SABPP competency model to HR. Findings of the study are essential for universities as they will be able to assess the significance of HR programmes.



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WHO IS INVOLVED?

You have been identified to take part in the study as you were identified as an expert. Purposive sampling has been adopted so as to identify experts.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICS

Please understand that you are not being forced to take part in this study and the choice whether to participate or not is yours. However, I would really appreciate it if you do share your thoughts with us. If you choose not take part in answering these questions, you will not be affected in any way. If you agree to participate, you may stop me at any time and tell me that you don't want to go on with the completion of the questionnaire. If you do this there will also be no penalties and you will **NOT** be prejudiced in **ANY** way. Confidentiality will be observed professionally.

I will not be asking for your name anywhere on the questionnaire and no one will be able to link you to the answers you give. Only the researcher will have access to the unlinked information. The information will remain confidential and there will be no “come-backs” from the answers you give.

All ethical matters will be addressed. Ethical certificate was granted by the University of Fort Hare **Certificate Reference Number: DOD091SHLA01**

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The benefits of participating in the study will inform HR academics, professional bodies and HR practitioners. The study will add significantly to literature on the development of HR in South Africa and test the significance of the model proposed by the SABPP. Findings may be crucial in the development of HR and curriculum development in the future.

METHOD

The answering of the questionnaires will take much of your time as there are open ended questions. I will be asking you questions and I ask that you be as open and honest as possible in answering these questions.

Some questions may be of a personal and/or sensitive nature. I will be asking some questions that you may not have thought about before, and which also involve thinking about the past. I know that you cannot be absolutely certain about the answers to these questions but I ask that you try to think about these questions. When it comes to answering questions there are no right and wrong answers. Your input will greatly be appreciated.

Findings of the study can be availed to you as per request.



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CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo

University of Fort Hare

CELL: 0785656450/0747531970

EMAIL: yakendie@gmail.com / chlatywayo@ufh.ac.za

FURTHER CONTACT DETAILS FOR SUPERVISOR/ MENTOR

Nicole Dodd

nixdodd@gmail.com

0847985651

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT



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INFORMED CONSENT

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research I am carrying out as part of my PhD in Industrial Psychology titled “*Human Resources Competencies, Employability and Career Success in South Africa: Reflections of Senior Human Resource Practitioners.*” I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop this questionnaire completion at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise in this questionnaire completion.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my organisation on the results of the completed research.

.....

Signature of participant

Date:.....

I hereby agree to the tape recording of my participation in the study

.....

Signature of participant

Date:.....

APPENDIX D: CALL OUT FROM SABPP

SABPP RESEARCH - THE LINK BETWEEN HR COMPETENCIES AND EMPLOYABILITY

Examining the HR competencies essential for employability in South Africa



There is a global lack of literature regarding HR employability and career success. The role that HR competencies play in HR employability and career success needs to be explored. This PhD study will add significantly to the development of the HR profession in South Africa. The study is based on the SABPP National HR Competency Model and your participation will ensure that competencies that will enhance employability and eventually career successes are identified. Finally, the study will be used to inform the HR curriculum in South Africa.

As a participant your contributions will contribute immensely to the development of the future of HR in South Africa. The SABPP is working with academics to build an empirical knowledge base of the profession, so please help us with this project.




The qualitative phase requires at least 100 (experts) respondents. Please contact Clifford or Nicole to get a copy of the questionnaire. The closing date is 30 June 2015.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo
University of Fort Hare
CELL: 0785656450 OR 0747531970
EMAIL: yakendie@gmail.com
chlatywayo@ufh.ac.za

FURTHER CONTACT DETAILS FOR SUPERVISOR/ MENTOR

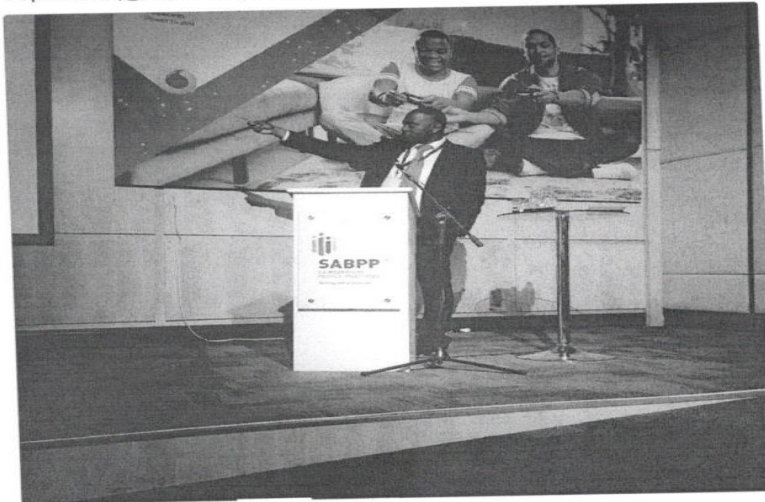
Nicole Dodd
nixdodd@gmail.com
0847985651

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APPENDIX E: RESEARCH IN PRACTICE CONFERENCE

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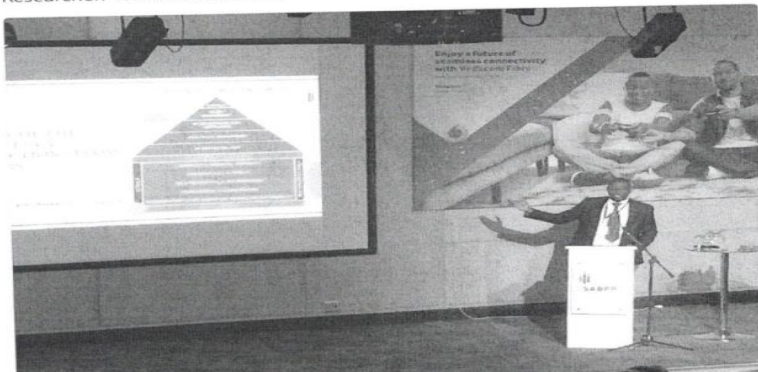


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Applicability of the SABPP Competence Model, speaks now Clifford Hlatywayo, Researcher. #HRStandards2016



APPENDIX F: RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDE

RESEARCHER GUIDE



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FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT & COMMERCE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Abstract

The dynamic, highly volatile nature of globalisation places new demands on HR professionals. Changes in the world of work have given room to new roles for practitioners and, in turn, have led to the development of new competencies. HR professionals need to be both analytic and have people skills so that they can add value to organisations. HR professionals must be equipped to face the new challenges placed in the field. When graduates are better informed of the skills required by employers, it helps them to be more prepared for employment as they develop their own work readiness skills. The study seeks to reconcile the demands of organisations, professional bodies and universities to inform an optimised ideal HR syllabus.



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Debrief

My name is Clifford Kendrick Hlatywayo (200604849). I am a PHD candidate in the Department of Industrial Psychology at the University of Fort Hare conducting research as a prerequisite for the completion of my degree. The research is on “*Human Resources Competencies, Employability and Career Success in South Africa: Reflections of Senior Human Resource Practitioners.*” The research is solely for academic purposes and all information obtained will be kept in the strictness of confidence. Your name is not required and there is no right or wrong answer.

Your contributions are highly appreciated

Thank you

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Please tick/ scribe where appropriate

1. Race

Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Other (specify)
-------	-------	----------	--------	-----------------

2. Gender

Male	Female	
------	--------	--

3. Age

30 and below	31-40	41-50	51-55	56+
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4. What is your Income Range?

.....

5. Current Job title

.....

6. Years of experience

.....



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7. Please state in order your academic qualifications and place acquired

Senior Secondary school or below.....

Undergraduate degree (e.g. B Com Human Resources).....

Postgraduate degree/s (e.g., MA, MSc, MBA).....

Professional qualification.....

Other.....

.....

.....

.....

SECTION B: EMPLOYABILITY

8. a) Do you think you were employable when you left university?

.....

b) If so why/If not why

.....
.....
.....

9. What measures did you take to become employable?

.....
.....
.....

10. How long did it take to get your first job?

.....

11. What competencies do you have now?

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.....



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12. What Competencies do you regard as essential to employability in HR?

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13. In relation to question 7, can you link your academic qualification to professional development? e.g. B Comm Industrial psychology to HR officer,

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SECTION C CAREER SUCCESS

14. What competencies do you attribute to career success?

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.....

15. a) Are you satisfied with the position that you currently occupy?

.....
b) If so why/ if not why not?
.....
.....

16. a) Are you satisfied with salary?

.....
b) Why or why not?
.....
.....

17. a) Are you satisfied with salary growth?

.....
b) Why or why not?
.....



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18. Are you satisfied with promotions?

.....
b) If so why/ if not why not
.....
.....

19. a) Are you satisfied with your career progression?

.....

22. Did the introduction of the model affect your practice? If yes, how? If not why not?

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23. Which are the key competencies required by organisations for HR professionals to execute their duties effectively in South Africa?

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.....

24. What other competencies do you regard as essential?

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25. Is there a significant relationship between the identified competencies, employability and career success? Please elaborate your answer.

.....
.....
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.....

Thank you very much for you time

APPENDIX G: PSUEDONYMS

Respondents' code

1 Jane	19 Babalwa
2 Susan	20 Lindelwa
3 Faith	21 Zizipho
4 Nicole	22 Athenkosi
5 Penny	23 Unathi
6 Siphho	24 Chan
7 Rob	25 John
8 Qebo	26 Kimberly
9 Zubeida	27 Boly
10 Peter	28 Cliff
11 Moses	29 Siphe
12 Simon	30 Craig
13 Noluthando	31 Mpho
14 Siphokazi	32 Muhasin
15 Sesethu	33 Gabriel
16 Stephen	34 Charisa
17 Mark	35 Abbie
18 Ludwe	



APPENDIX H: PROOF READING CERTIFICATE

Language editing

I, Jeanne Enslin, acknowledge that I did the language editing of **Clifford Hlatywayo's** thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology at the University of Fort Hare.

As agreed with the Clifford, I did not do the formatting nor did I check or work on the List of references or do cross-referencing; I did however correct some references in text that were not in the correct format and left several comments for her regarding that.

The title of the thesis is:

**Human Resources Competencies, Employability and Career Success in South
Africa: Reflections of Senior Human Resource Practitioners.**

If any major changes are made to the text after I sent the thesis to **Clifford Hlatywayo** on 15 February 2018, I cannot be held responsible for any errors that are made.

The quality of the final document, in terms of language, formatting and references, remains the student's responsibility.

Detailed feedback of all the language editing done has been provided to Clifford in writing and is evident in the version of the thesis in track changes (with comments).



Jeanne Enslin
Language editor
082-6961224.

APPENDIX I: TURN IT IN REPORT

**HUMAN RESOURCES
COMPETENCIES,
EMPLOYABILITY AND CAREER
SUCCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
REFLECTIONS OF SENIOR
HUMAN RESOURCE
PRACTITIONERS.**

by Cliff Hlatwayo

Submission date: 26-Jan-2019 08:14PM (UTC+0200)

Submission ID: 1068806819

File name: TYWAYO,_Clifford_PhD_Thesis_Feb2018_-_with_changes_accepted.docx (4.17M)

Word count: 105462

Character count: 620195

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