

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR THE
ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Philosophiae Doctor in Industrial
Psychology at the Mafikeng Campus of the North-West University

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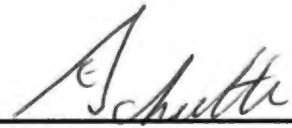
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DECLARATION

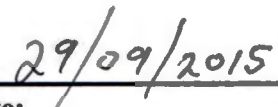
I, Nico Eric Schutte, declare that the dissertation for Philosophiae Doctor in Industrial Psychology titled *The development of a diagnostic tool for the assessment of competencies for human resource management professionals in South Africa* has not previously been submitted by me for the degree at this or any other institution. I further declare that this is my own work, and that all material used herein is acknowledged.

The referencing and the editorial style are as prescribed by the Publication Manual (6th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA).

This thesis is submitted in the format of four research articles.



Signature



Date:

DEDICATION



A POEM: BY NICO SCHUTTE

When you start out to find your way
You sometimes fall to your thoughts at prey,
Be cautious you might go astray
Never search for-never knowing
If it's the right path you're going.

Be extremely watchful on your talking,
A strange road it takes you sometimes walking,
Don't we all know the power of the tongue?
It can take you through a desert forty years long.

Be proud on principles and values - humble,
Don not let pride - the beauty of the world let you to stumble.
So please don't lose your way and wander far,
God's creation - remember who you are.

Influence - and be influenced -
Inspire through passion and motivation
Are we all not created for relation?

Becoming an emotionally intelligent being,
Is sometimes much harder than it might seem.
Have faith in what you can be or do,
Not what others expect of you.

Visualize- stop sometimes to look where you are going,
It is much better than not knowing.

Sowing in to people's life is a blessing in disguise
A pattern of living that's quite unique,
One you may never stop to seek.

Rejoice - be happy or,
Frustration, tension begins to show,
Draining your energy to all time low,
This is a road you don't want to go,
Never search for-never knowing
If it's the right path you're going.

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my dearest wife and beautiful daughters, for all the love and support, and for sharing this learning experience with me. Thank you for believing in me, and for always being there for me. A good wife is her husband's pride and joy (Proverbs, 12:3);

Prof. Nicolene Barkhuizen, who acted as my promoter, thank you for not giving up on me and all your support;

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ABSTRACT

Organisations worldwide are currently experiencing a complex and dynamic changing environment in which they must compete to remain sustainable. This highlights the need for the human resources (HR) function to be more proactive, progressive, and worthy of respect. Yet, empirical research on competence requirements for HR practitioners in the South African context has not been forthcoming. The few detailed empirical research studies conducted focused primarily on the roles and practices that HR practitioners should execute in South African organisations, without focusing on the underlying competencies needed to execute these roles effectively.

The main objective of this research was to develop a diagnostic tool for the assessment of competencies for HR professionals in the South African context. For the present study, HR officers and managers of various public and private organisations were chosen as the unit of analysis, as they are in the best position to act as informants on the competencies they desire in HR practitioners. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and their ability to provide the desired information. The sample size for this study varied according to the different steps, as prescribed for scale development. The sample sizes were as follows: pilot study — $N = 189$, validation study — $N = 483$ and current application of HR competencies — $N = 481$. Data analyses were done with the aid of SPSS and EQS statistical software, and included descriptive statistics (i.e. means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and frequencies), exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, reliability analyses, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), analysis of variance (ANOVA), and t-tests.

From our document analyses, we concluded that HR management (HRM) can be considered a 'semi-profession.' Currently, professional HR bodies are limited in terms of independence, their contribution to society, their body of knowledge, and research. Furthermore, the professional bodies lack legal status and recognition by the wider public. HRM is thus an occupational group in South Africa that displays some characteristics of a profession, and is, therefore, in the process of professionalisation.

ABSTRACT

For the pilot study, exploratory factor analyses resulted in three distinguishable competence dimensions for HR professionals: (1) *Professional behaviour and leadership* (with the factors of Leadership- and personal credibility, Organisational capability, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication, and Citizenship); (2) *Service orientation and execution* (with the factors of Talent management, HR governance, Analytics and measurement, and HR service delivery); and (3) *Business intelligence* (with the factors of Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, and HR technology). All factors showed excellent reliabilities.

In the validation study, exploratory factor analyses resulted in three distinguishable competence dimensions for HR professionals: (1) *Professional behaviour and leadership* (with the factors of Leadership- and personal credibility, solution creation, interpersonal communication, and Innovation); (2) *Service orientation and execution* (with the factors of Talent management, HR risk, HR metrics, and HR service delivery); and (3) *Business intelligence* (with the factors of Strategic impact, HR business knowledge, Business acumen, and HR technology). All factors showed acceptable construct equivalence for the English and indigenous language groups. The results furthermore showed that significant differences exist between the respondents regarding the importance of HR competencies, based on the variables *age*, *qualification*, *job level*, and *years of work experience*. Younger-generation respondents with a higher level qualification viewed Leadership- and personal credibility, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication, and Innovation as more important than did those with a lower level qualification. Furthermore, respondents on management levels with more work experience regarded *solution creation and implementation* as more important, compared to operational groups and those with less work experience.

Finally, the results showed that HR many competencies are poorly applied in both private- and public-sector workplaces. The application of talent management, HR metrics, HR business knowledge, and innovation was considered the poorest. Furthermore, the results also showed that white ethnic groups experienced a poorer application of all HRM competencies compared to the experience of the black African groups.

ABSTRACT

This research makes important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on HRM competencies in the South African workplace. Moreover, this research also contributes to the clustering and refining of key HR competencies, to provide a more holistic and condensed approach to achieving HR professionalism. Methodologically, this research introduces a new and reliable HR competence measure that can be used to track the development of HR professionalism and competence in the workplace. Managers and HR professionals can therefore use this measurement as a basis to improve HR competencies and subsequent HR service delivery.

Recommendations for practice and future research are made.

Keywords: competencies, diagnostic tool, human resources management, human resource professionalism, human resource professionals, validation

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Organisations worldwide are currently experiencing a complex and dynamic changing environment in which most businesses must compete to remain sustainable. Most of these organisations realise that their competitive advantage lies within their employees (Cascio & Boudreau, 2008; Chabault, Hulin, & Soparnot, 2012; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Kaye & Smith, 2012). Worldwide socio-economic developments such as globalisation, increasing speed towards a service economy, shorter product life cycles, changes in workforce demographics, a focus on customer loyalty, the increasing ‘war for talent, and an emphasis on financial performance challenge the human resources (HR) function in its role of creating added value for the organisation (Mamman & Sumantri, 2014; Schultz, 2010; Srimannarayana, 2010; Story, Barbuto, Luthans, & Bovaid, 2014).

It is therefore to be expected that HR professionals should be at the forefront of organisational strategic leadership (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2011; Story *et al.*, 2014). Yet, to the contrary, the importance of activities performed by human resource management (HRM) seems to be losing ground in the majority of organisations, while other functional areas (for example, information technology, operations, finance, and marketing) are gaining greater influence (Guest & Woodrow, 2012). In most cases, HRM appears to be playing a secondary role, at a time when the ability to harness an organisation’s HR should be more in demand and more valued than ever before (Compton, 2009). Research evidence suggests that executives uphold a narrow view of the HR function and HR practitioners (Guest & Woodrow, 2012; Magau & Roodt, 2010; Public Service Commission, 2010; Schultz, 2010; Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005). In fact, there is still a prevalent typifying of the HR discipline today, which includes the perception is that HR functions are overstaffed, reactive, and

staffed by rule-followers who insist on operating only within the parameters of policies and procedures (Guest & Woodrow, 2012). Moreover, HR practitioners are viewed as a cost to the company that needs to be minimised to promote organisational financial performance (Becker & Huselid, 2006).

As far back as the early seventies, Foulkes (1975) called for businesses to incorporate new social and individual values in the workplace, and highlighted the need for the HR function (personnel departments) to be more proactive, progressive, and worthy of respect. The available studies on HRM in the South African context also amplified this notion (Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; Akinnusi, 2008; Barkhuizen, 2013; Barkhuizen, Goosen, van Loggerenberg & Malan, 2009; De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2010; Ferreira, 2012; Hall & Fourie, 2007; Kleynhans, 2006; Magau & Roodt, 2010; Scheepers & Schuping, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Steyn, 2008; Van de Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006; Van Rensburg, 2009; Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011a; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011b; Van Zyl & Venier, 2006; Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005; Walters, 2006).

However, research on the competence requirements, as well as competence models of HR practitioners in the South African context, remains scarce. Moreover, no competence assessments currently exist to measure specific HRM practitioner abilities and skills to fulfil key and strategic HRM functions in the workplace. Therefore, the need exists to develop a diagnostic tool to validate a professional HRM competence model applicable to the South African context.

This present research followed the article format. Below is a conceptual framework of the structuring of the thesis.

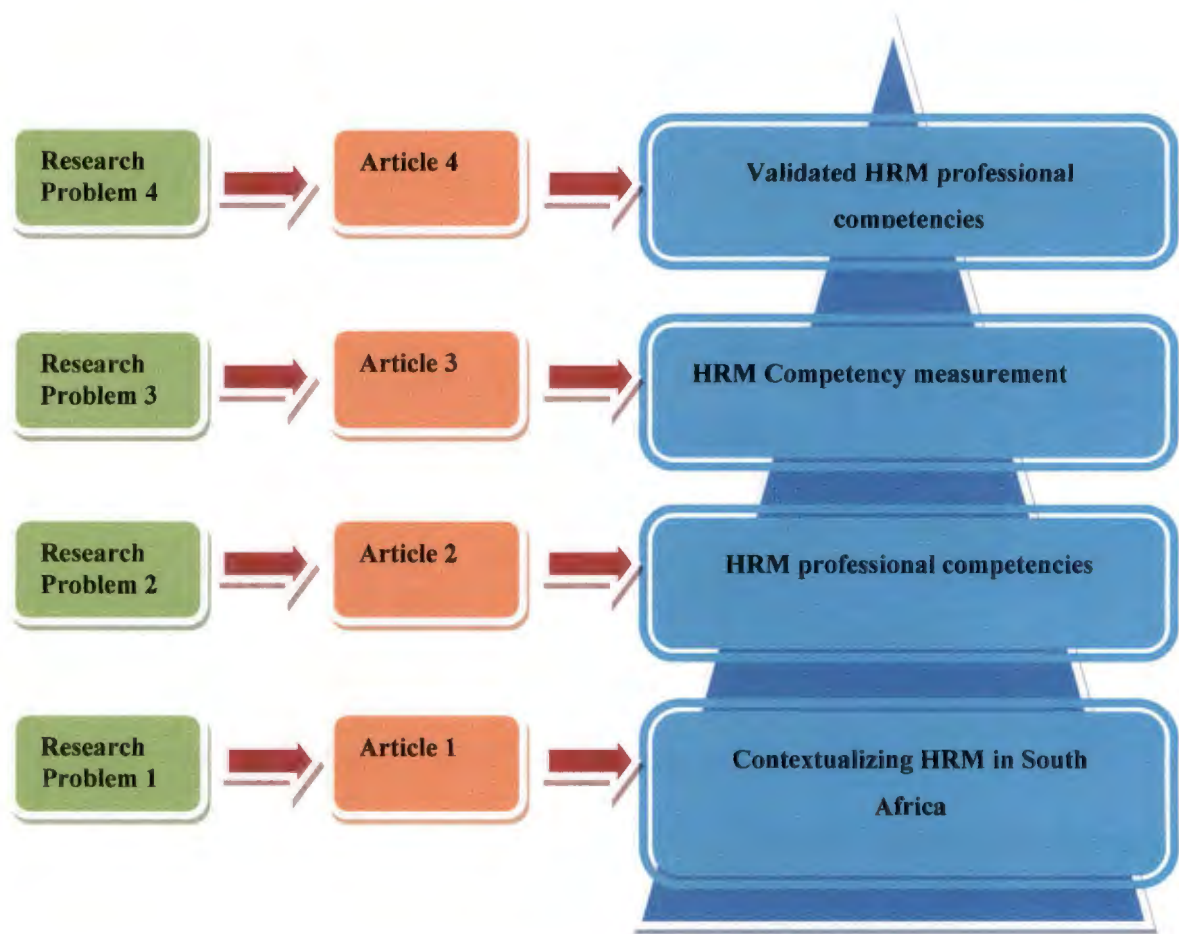


Figure 1.1: Contextual layout of the study (Author's own)

1.2 BACKGROUND

1.2.1 Contextualising HRM

The evolution of the field of HRM is well documented in literature (see Swanepoel, Van Wyk, Erasmus, & Schenck, 2003; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011a; 2011b; Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005). Likewise, it is acknowledged by scholars and researchers that, over the course of the past three decades, people management has steadily developed to include a broader scope of functions and authority. Torrington *et al.* (2009) proposed that, rather than representing a revolution in people management practices, the rise of HRM signifies a progression towards a more effective practice. Similarly, Watson (2009) emphasised that HRM is not a new, or even recent, managerial or academic 'fad' or ground-breaking invention that is strange to modern circumstances. It is a profoundly sound concept that would be sensibly taken up by

people in charge of any human enterprise in which work tasks are undertaken, and where there is a concern for that enterprise to continue into the future as a viable social and economic unit (pp. 8-9).

According to Lengnick-Hall *et al.* (2009), numerous attempts have been made to explain and define the influence of HRM in the last 30 years. Most of the studies tracked its origins back to the 1920s, in the United States of America (USA), when more liberal employers were exploring ways to achieve competitive advantage through “unity of interest [between employer and employee], cooperation and investment in labour as a human resource” (p. 64).

Towards the end of this section, a brief timeline is provided that illustrates the historical development of the HRM discipline in South Africa and elsewhere. Figure 1.2 clearly shows how the HRM discipline evolved over the past two decades. HRM, originally termed *personnel administration*, materialised as a clearly defined field by the 1920s, especially within the USA. The focus was mainly on the technical aspects of hiring, evaluating, training, and compensating employees, and was very much a staff function in most organisations. The discipline, as a general rule, did not focus on the relationships between diverse employment practices and the overall organisational performance. The discipline also lacked a unifying paradigm. Subsequently, we have seen many changes of the name for the field of HRM. The name change was the result of the global changes in social and economic movements (Brewster, Carey, Dowling, Grobler, Holland, & Warnich, 2003; Fitzenz & Davison, 2002; Jones, George, & Hill, 2000; Kleiman, 2000).

In the South African context, the legal, social, and political landscape changed dramatically during the 1990s, which put a lot of pressures on organisations to establish HRM practices that are aligned with a new democratic dispensation. Furthermore, South African organisations also came to realise that there is a movement from people management as a support function towards a much more strategic role, in order to attract, retain, and engage talent (Barkhuizen, 2014). Subsequently, it led to the design of the HR- and workforce scorecards (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Huselid, Becker, & Beatty, 2005), as well as an

additional focus on the return on investment (ROI) of the HR function and its programmes (Cascio, 2000; Fitz-Enz, 2000; 2002).

In addition, since the 1990s, there has been an increased use of technology and a new belief that HRM is adding value to the organisation's product or service (Hall & Fourie, 2007; Ulrich, 1997; 1998; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; 2006). HR departments are now viewed as a strategic partner. The theoretical significance of strategic HRM stems from the resource-based view of the organisation, whereby human capital is treated as a strategic asset in improving organisational performance, in order to gain a competitive advantage (Becker & Huselid, 2006).

The focus of debates relating to HRM is, however, continuously changing, resulting in the progression of both academic theory and organisational expectations (Ulrich, Allen, Brockbank, Yonger, & Nyman, 2009). It highlights the need for a proactive HR function, its crucial importance to the success of organisations, and the possibility of change in the HR function. Moreover, research clearly shows a disconnection between how far HRM has developed in becoming a profession in South African organisations and the reality of the implementation thereof. Therefore, the need exists to do in-depth analyses of the historical roots of the HRM discipline in South Africa, as it shaped current HRM practices, and will continue to do so in the future.

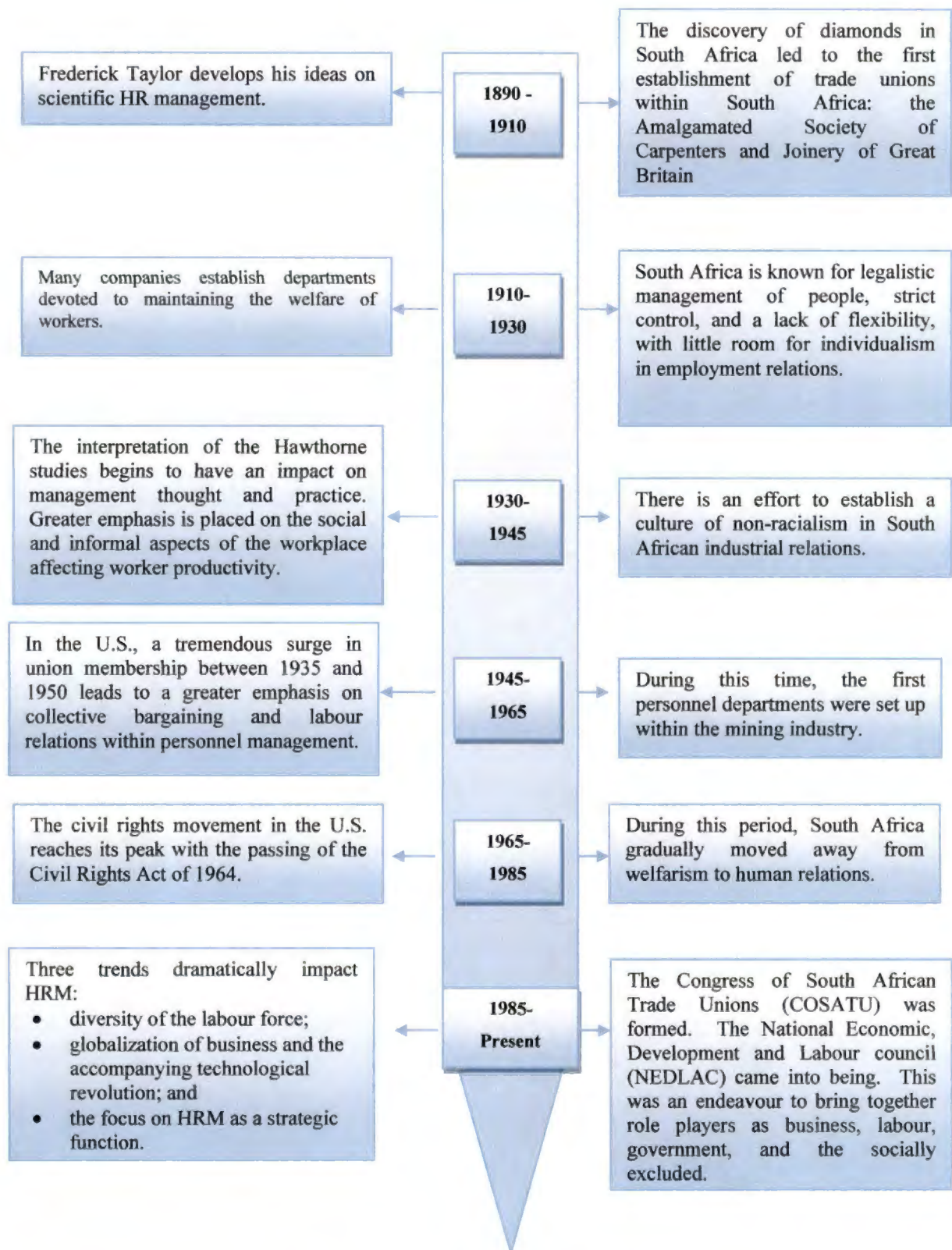


Figure 1.2: Global Evolution of Human Resource Management (Author's Own)

1.2.2 HRM competencies and competence models

Several authors have postulated that a competence-based approach to HRM is most effective in a changing the workplace (Dubois, Rothwell, Stern, & Kemp, 2004; Gangani, McLean, & Braden, 2006; Ulrich *et al.*, 2009). This involves the leveraging of human capital in organisations, as opposed to the traditional job-based approach. A competence-based approach moves the focus away from jobs toward individuals and their competencies (Ulrich *et al.*, 2009). Core competencies, or those competencies that cut across jobs, have become increasingly important as distinctions between individual jobs become more distorted, work roles change, and the environment is less stable (Byham & Moyer, 2005; Schultz, 2010; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholz, & Younger, 2008).

According to Verma, Broers, Paterson, and Schroder (2009), competencies ought to be the collective language of the HR field. They further asserted that competencies provide the dimension against which people should be assessed for readiness or capability to move into jobs, against which they should be appraised, and according to which they should be developed. According to McClelland (cited in Yusoff & Ramayah, 2012), competencies represent the knowledge, skills, traits, attitudes, self-concepts, values, and motives directly related to job performance and important career outcomes. In addition, Noe (2012) postulated that competence models may help South African HR practitioners to improve the skills selection and efficiency level of their workforce, in order to complement changing market requirements in the midst of competitive business challenges.

The application of competence models to improve HR practitioners' skill sets is a common feature of the USA's society; however, it is not common practice in South Africa (Meyer, 2012). The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) is an example of a leading organisation that has created several competence models over the past 30 years, which are used by many HR practitioners and their organisations. Furthermore, existing HR competence research is mainly descriptive and fragmentary. As a result, various HR professionals and stakeholders undeniably have different views and expectations of HRM and its roles, and use different criteria to assess its effectiveness (Boudreau & Lawler, 2014; O'

Brien, & Linehan, 2014).

There is an increasing global interest and need among researchers, scholars, practitioners, businesses, and professionals to develop sound competence models for HR practitioners. Studies by Brewster *et al.* (2000), Budhwar and Debrah (2001), Hsu and Seat (2000), Brockbank and Ulrich (2003), Junaidah (2007), Choi and Wan Khairuzzaman (2008), Ulrich *et al.* (2008), and Caldwell (2010) revealed that it is imperative that researchers and scholars do more studies on HR competencies and their relevance within organisational settings.

Over the last three decades, a multitude of HR competence models evolved, mainly in the USA and Europe. The national HR Survey 2011, conducted by Knowledge Resources and the South African Board for People Practices, showed that only 20% of South African companies have an HR competence model in place. Most of these organisations applied overseas models, without taking cognisance of the unique South African context (SABPP Stakeholder Survey, 2011).

It is worth mentioning that most of the studies on HRM competence models were carried out by the Business School of the University of Michigan, USA. These studies build on the HRM Competency Model developed by Ulrich *et al.* (2008). According to Brockbank and Ulrich (2008), there are six roles that HR practitioners should fulfil, which require specific competencies: cultural and change steward, talent manager-organisational designer, strategic architect, credible activist, business ally, and operations executor. The competence to fulfil these roles has been tested in several studies, and remained consistent, despite some of the competencies' descriptions being replaced with newer terminology (see Ulrich, 2012). Ulrich's (2008) model serves as a guideline for various global organisations (see Figure 1.3).

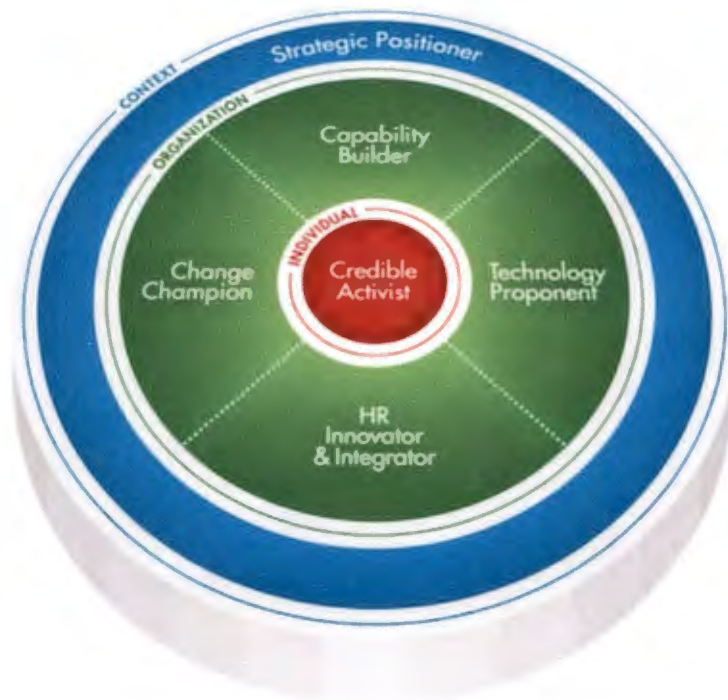


Figure 1.3: Ulrich HRM Competency Model (Adapted from Ulrich, 2012)

Many authors are of the opinion that competence models developed in the USA may not be applicable to other countries, because of cultural diversity aspects (Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011; Mamman & Sumantri, 2014). New HR competence models are thus needed, as the business world is changing at an unmatched rate. In order to stay competitive and relevant, the needed competence models must be continually researched and updated. Global economic uncertainty, technology developments, customer demands, demographic transitions, and industry mergers have led to HR issues being more important to business leaders than ever before (Hall & Fourie, 2007). In support, Caldwell (2010) argued that competence models are perceived to be broadly effective in selecting business partners, but less effective in developing business partners or linking HR strategy with business strategy.

In view of this, the SABPP, the HR professional body of South Africa, launched the South African HR Competency Model in 2012. The model's development was important, as it clearly expresses what practitioners in the field should be able to deliver. The model provides a foundation for the continuous professional development of South African HR

practitioners. The model builds on the previous SABPP model, published in 1990.

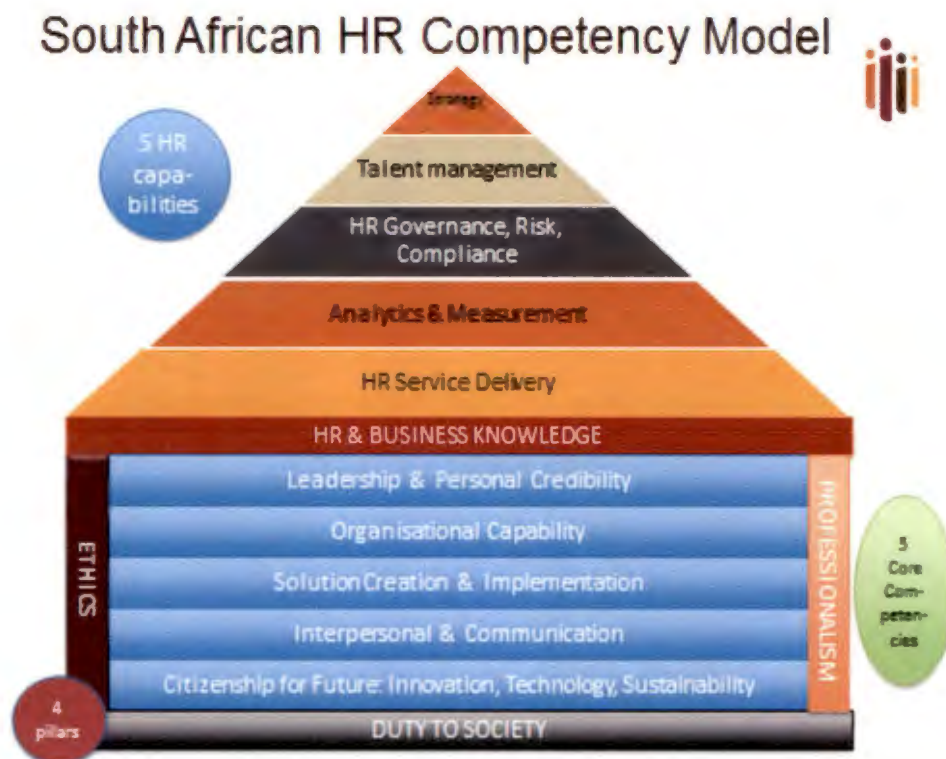


Figure 1.4: South African HR Competency Model (Adapted from Meyer, 2012).

As can be seen from Figure 1.4, above, the model consists of three broad competence areas:

- the four pillars of professionalism form the foundation for professional HR practice;
- five core competencies needed by HR practitioners to do high-quality HR work constitute the building blocks; and
- five HR capabilities are required to ensure the HR function’s strategic HR impact.

The SABPP, as the newly established HR standard-setting and professional body for HR in South Africa, is seeking to set a national standard for HR competence through the model, and to provide HR practitioners with a common context for developing the required competencies in meeting the required national standard. Furthermore, the model recognises that HR practitioners are at different organisational levels, levels of specialisation, and stages in their

careers, yet, as a common framework, the model is intended to provide focus and consistency, and indicate development opportunities for HR practitioners in South Africa.

1.2.3 Measuring HRM competencies

As mentioned earlier, most of the measuring instruments that are currently in use emanated from the USA and Europe. Developing countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Africa are also following the trend of applying developed countries' measures in an emerging market context (see Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2011; De Winne, Delmotte, Gilbert, & Sels, 2013, Mamman & Somantri, 2014; Shrimannarayana, 2010; Yusoff & Ramayah, 2012).

The predominant measure used in the assessment of HRM competencies is that of Ulrich *et al.* (2008). Although the measurement proved to be valid and reliable in the South African context (see Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2011), the HR discipline is in dire need of a sound empirical measurement that gives a true reflection of the competence requirements of South African HR practitioners. Not only is it important to establish reliable and valid methods of measurement, these have to take cognisance of the cultural diversity in a multicultural setting such as South Africa.

According to Van de Vijver (2001), we should think about the issue of equivalency when assessing HR. The assurance of measurement equivalency across different cultures is important for determining whether measures of a construct in one culture also exist in other cultures, to determine the degree of variability of the measures across several cultures, and to determine whether the measures are universal or culture-specific (Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007; Meiring, Van de Vijver, & Rothmann, 2006). Moreover, assessing measurement equivalency across countries and languages provides information about the factorial invariance of an instrument, which allows the researcher a degree of confidence in using the instrument in different cultural settings (Leung & Van de Vijver, 1997).

Although the SABPP recently established the new HR Professional Competency Model, measurements to assess these competencies in organisations are lacking. The need exists to develop a diagnostic tool and measurement that can assess the HRM competencies identified by the SABPP in a multi-cultural context such as South Africa.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

In today's competitive and constantly changing business environment, competence models may help HR practitioners to improve the skills range and efficiency level of their workforce to match changing market demands, in order to respond to competitive business challenges. Behavioural scientists and organisational development practitioners seek to improve individual and group work processes through the application of systematic procedures and research-based principles. Job analysis techniques and, to a lesser extent, competence models, have long been used to establish the requirements of jobs and positions throughout organisations and provided input into selection, training, and management practices. Knowledge, skills, abilities, other characteristics, tasks and functions and, more recently, competencies have become the building blocks of HR selection- and development processes. Furthermore, identifying competencies has become an established method of identifying the requirements of supervisory, managerial, and leadership positions, rather than job- or task analysis techniques, because these provide a more general description of responsibilities associated with these positions (Briscoe & Hall, 1999).

This research addresses four main research problems:

The *first research problem* looks into the intricacies of the HRM as a profession in the South African context. While previous studies attempted to explain the development of HRM in South Africa (see Van der Westhuizen *et al.*, 2003; Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011a; 2011b), there is still a great deal of vagueness surrounding the original purpose and transformation of HRM in South Africa. The present researcher deemed it necessary to do an in-depth analysis of the historical origins of HRM in South Africa, as these influenced current practices and

competency requirements of HR practitioners.

The *second research problem relates* to the availability of HRM competence measures in the South African context. As mentioned previously, most of the research studies in South Africa used the measuring instruments developed by Ulrich (1997). Although these instruments are sound and have been validated, they are not always applicable in the South African context. As a result, there is a need to develop an HRM competence measure that can provide a true reflection of the competence requirements of HRM practitioners in the South African workplace.

The *third research problem* relates to the validation of an HR professional competence measure that takes into account the holistic competence requirements for HR practitioners in a multi-cultural setting such as South Africa. While the SABPP developed such a model for HR practitioners, the model has yet to be empirically validated and tested for equivalency across different cultural groups.

The *fourth and final research problem* relates to the current application of HR professional competencies and competence models for HR practitioners in the South African context. Several publications have highlighted the confusions and uncertainties regarding the exact contribution of HR practitioners in the workplace (Barkhuizen, 2013; Schultz, 2010). Moreover, many of the studies that have been done in the South African context used international measures to assess the practices and roles of HR practitioners in the workplace, as opposed to the key competencies they should possess (Steyn, 2008; Walters, 2006). Therefore, the present research aimed to clarify the exact competencies needed for HR professionals in the South African context, which could add to the development of sound competence models.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for the present study is: *Can a diagnostic tool be developed to assess the competencies of HR professionals in South Africa?*

This research aimed to answer four sub-questions:

- What are the intricacies of HRM as a managerial profession in South Africa?
- What are the competencies required to develop a HR professional competence model?
- To what extent is a HRM competence model and measure valid in a multicultural South African context?
- To what extent are South African HR practitioners currently allowed to display HR competencies in the workplace?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research was to develop a diagnostic tool for the assessment of competencies required of HR professionals in the South African context.

The objectives of this study were to:

- explore the intricacies of HRM as a managerial profession in South Africa;
- determine the competencies required to develop a HR professional competence model;
- determine the extent to which a HRM competence model and measure is valid in a multicultural South African context; and
- determine the extent to which South African HR practitioners are currently allowed to demonstrate HR competencies in the workplace.

1.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

For purposes of this research, three main and 12 sub-hypotheses were formulated. The proposed model is displayed in Figure 1.5, below, followed by the hypotheses. For purposes of this research, and based on the preceding literature review, three HR competence dimensions were identified: *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*.

- ***Professional behaviour and leadership*** refer to the suitability of HR professionals' actions whether intentionally or unintentionally towards environmental changes or conditions that reflect on the qualities that are connected to HR leadership and professional responsibilities.
- ***HR service orientation and execution*** involves the ability of HR practitioners to analyse situations or problems, make timely and sound decisions, construct plans and achieve optimal results to the changing demands of customers.
- ***HR Business intelligence*** refers to the ability by HR professionals to position itself as an essential value-adding department of the organization through the usage of information to gain a competitive edge over competitors.

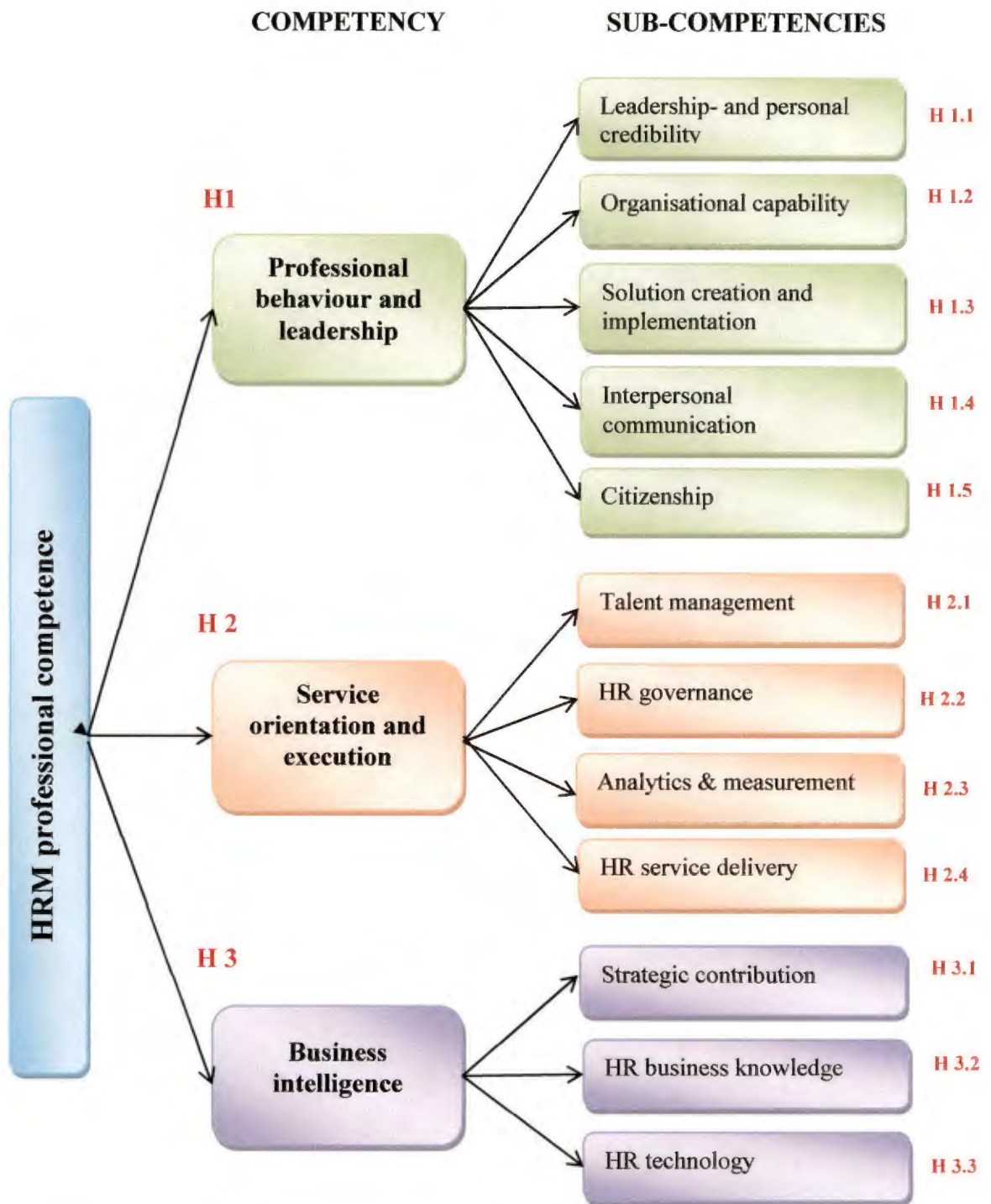


Figure 1.5: Hypothesised model for the study (Author's own)

- H 1. *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 1.1 *Leadership - and personal credibility* have a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.2 *Organisational capability* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.3 *Solution creation and implementation* have a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.4 *Interpersonal communication* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.5 *Citizenship* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 2 *Service orientation and execution* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 2.1 *Talent management* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 2.2 *HR governance* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service Orientation and Execution* competency.
- H 2.3 *Analytics and measurement* have a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 2.4 *HR service delivery* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 3 *Business intelligence* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 3.1 *Strategic contribution* has a direct and positive relationship with *Business intelligence* competency.
- H 3.2 *HR business knowledge* has a direct and positive relationship *Business intelligence* competency.

H 3.3 *HR technology* has a direct and positive relationship with *Business intelligence* competency.

1.7 EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The present research makes a theoretical, methodological, and a practical contribution.

1.7.1 Theoretical contribution

Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan (2007) provided a useful taxonomy with which to assess the theoretical contribution of an empirical article. In terms of this taxonomy, the theoretical contribution of the present study is theory building and theory testing (see Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6 indicates a taxonomy that combines the dual components of an empirical study's theoretical contribution namely: theory building and theory testing. An empirical study can offer a considerable theoretical contribution by offering either valuable theory building or -testing, or both (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Theory building and -testing can be used to classify empirical articles into five discrete categories: reporters, testers, qualifiers, builders, and expanders. *Reporters* are empirical articles that are typically low in both theory building and testing, whereas *testers* are empirical articles that have high levels of theory testing, but low levels of theory building. *Qualifiers* are empirical articles that contain moderate levels of theory testing and theory building, and *builders* are articles that are relatively high in theory building, but relatively low in theory testing. Lastly, *expanders* are articles that are relatively high in theory building and theory testing.

With regard to theory building, this study examined a previously unexplored relationship between HRM, professionalism, and capabilities. In terms of testing the theory, this study grounded prediction with existing models, diagrams, and figures, which, in essences, comes very close to testing the actual theory (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007). Thus, the present study can be classified as an expander, given that it built and tested theory related to HRM, professionalism, and capabilities.

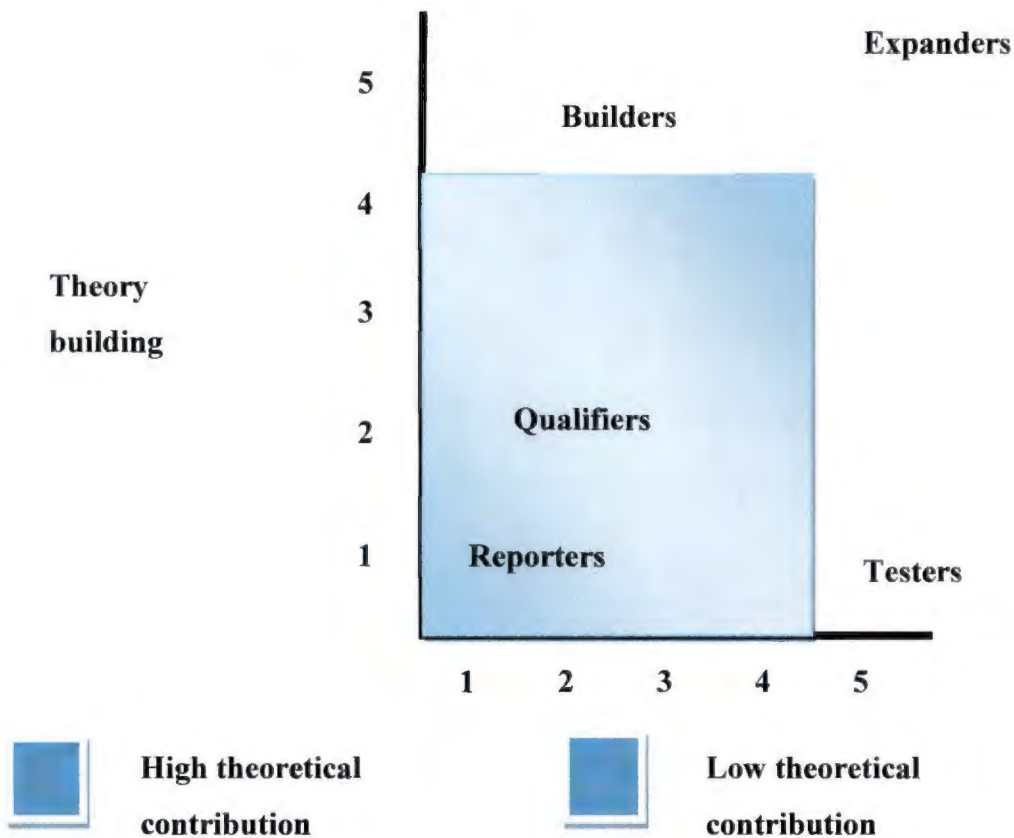


Figure 1.6: A taxonomy of the theoretical contribution for empirical articles
(source: Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007).

1.7.2 Methodological contribution

This study makes an important methodological contribution by having developed and validated a competence measure for the assessment of competencies for HR professionals in the South African context. This diagnostic tool can be used in the broader sub-Saharan Africa, other emerging countries, as well as in first-world countries.

1.7.3 Practical contribution

This research makes an important practical contribution in the form of a diagnostic tool to detect the extent to which HRM practitioners apply competencies in the workplace. This will assist HRM practitioners and managers to take stock of the current competencies in various

HRM functions, and take corrective action where necessary.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.8.1 Research approach

A quantitative research approach was followed. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data and attain the research goals (Field, 2009). The present research mostly followed the DeVellis scale development process (DeVellis, 1991). The steps of the DeVellis scale development process, as well as the extent to which the researcher applied these in the present study, are indicated in Table 1.1, below.

Table 1.1: DeVellis Scale Development Process

Description of scale development
<p>Step 1: Application in present study</p> <p>Step 1a: Application of a theoretical basis to develop the items</p> <p>Identification of the parameters of HRM theory to be included in the measurement scale, which informed the conceptual framework for the study.</p>
<p>Step 2: Item generation</p> <p>Item generation was based on theoretical relationships between constructs gleaned from an extensive literature review and document analyses. Statements were formulated, rather than questions.</p>
<p>Step 3: Determining the scale and measurement format</p> <p>Developing format of items, using statements in a Likert-response format (DeVellis, (1991). Additionally, checklist-style questions and open-ended questions were included.</p>
<p>Step 4: Conducting an item analysis to eliminate inadequate items</p> <p>An expert panel of 15 subject matter experts reviewed the scale, and were provided with construct definitions and asked to rate items in terms of adequacy, relevance, conciseness, and potentially confusing wording.</p>
<p>Step 5: Selecting validation items that can be administered to developmental sample</p> <p>This research did not include social desirability scales. The scale does use repetition of items that measure the same construct in different sub-scales to determine if similar or different responses were provided.</p>

Step 6: Designing and conduct a developmental study

Administering of HR professional competency diagnostic items and validation items to a sample of 150 to 300 HR practitioners and managers ($N=189$) at different levels within corporate institutions in South Africa.

Step 7: Evaluating the items

As advised by (DeVellis, 1991, p. 82-85) item-scale correlations, item variance, item means, and coefficient alphas were included when appropriate.

Step 7a: Determining construct validity of the measure

This included conducting exploratory factor analysis. At a later stage, confirmatory factor analysis would be conducted, but that would require a larger sample.

Step 7b: Determining the convergent validity of the measure

Convergent validity could not be determined in the current study.

Step 7c: Determining the divergent validity of the measure

This entails determine whether method effects are influencing the scale findings, which may also require a criterion-related study and a larger sample than the present sample.

Step 7d: Assessing the reliability of the scale

This entailed determining internal consistency reliabilities. Test-retest reliabilities could not be considered, as the respondents were anonymous. Some items would be expected to change over time, such as intention to quit or satisfaction. The alternative is to administer the scale to another sample, which would enable multiple measures of reliability to be compared.

Step 8: Optimising scale length

Due to the nature of the scale (a diagnostic tool that can be used regularly) the scale needed to be short enough to avoid respondent fatigue; therefore, considerable attention was given to optimizing scale length.

Source: DeVellis (1991)

1.8.2 Research method

1.8.2.1 Literature review

The literature review for the present study focused on HRM, competence models, and their dynamics, which included development of competency items for the model that would assist HR practitioners in applying the correct knowledge and skills within their discipline. A theoretical conceptualisation of the field of HRM was considered. Relevant journals, books, and case studies were consulted.

Both computer-based and manual searches of published research articles were conducted. HR, HR Development, industrial–organisational (I/O) psychology, and business literature were reviewed, along with the EBSCO computer database, to identify articles, dissertations, and book chapters that included analyses or discussions of the concept of competencies. The review also included examining various companies' reports, presentations, and material on competency implementation.

In addition, this research was done within the discipline of I/O psychology. I/O, according to Campbell (1999), is concerned with the application of psychological theory to understand the behaviour of people in the workplace. According to Muchinsky, Kriek, and Schreuder (1998), a study of the behaviour of people in the workplace implies (1) scientific observation, (2) evaluation, (3) optimal utilisation (selection, placement), and (4) influencing (changing, motivating).

The present research further explored the subfields of personnel psychology and organisational development. Personnel psychology was defined by Muchinsky, Kriek, and Schreuder (1998, p. 4) as "an applied discipline that focuses on individual differences in behaviour and job performance and on methods of measuring and predicting such performance."

A study of the effectiveness of an HR function falls within the field of I/O psychology, personnel psychology, and organisational development. Boninelli (2004) described the role of the HR function as dealing with people-related behaviour that is critical to organisational success, and the positioning of such behaviour or problems within the broader context of the organisation as a system.

The present research was also done within the multi-disciplinary field of evaluation. In evaluation research, methods of social science are used to assess the usefulness or effectiveness of social interventions (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). The body of knowledge on the effectiveness of an HR function could benefit from evaluation research in so far as

evaluation can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify neglected areas of need, neglected stakeholders, and specific problems pertaining to the delivery of products, to mention but a few. From a formative perspective, evaluation could further assist by shaping the mentioned HR function so that it would have the greatest beneficial impact upon its target community.

1.8.2.2 Sample

For the present study, HR officers and managers of various public and private organisations were chosen as the unit of analyses, as they were in the best position to act as informants on the competencies they desire in HR practitioners. The study involved purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and ability to provide the desired information.

The sample varied according the different steps, as prescribed by the scale development process of DeVellis (1991). The demographics of the sample ($N = 189$) for the pilot study (Manuscript 2) were as follows: 50.8% were men, 86.8% spoke indigenous languages, and 91% were black Africans (92.1%). A total of 34.9% of the respondents were aged 40-49 years, 42.3% were held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational qualification, and 39.2% were employed on middle management level. Of the respondents, 24.3% had six and ten years' work experience, 90.5% had tenure of 0-10 years in their current job, and 61.4% had tenure of 0-10 years in their current organisation.

The respondents for the validation of the competence measure (Manuscript 3) were HR officers and managers from various organisations in the public and private sector who had knowledge about HRM processes in the workplace. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and to provide the desired information. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, of which 483 were returned. This represented a 60.38% response rate. The demographics of the respondents in this sample were as follows: 55.3% were women, 70.6% spoke indigenous languages, and 78.3% were black Africans. Of the respondents, 29.6% were aged 30-39 years, 35.8% held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational

qualification, and 31.1% were employed on middle management level. A total of 38.4% of the respondents had six to 15 years' work experience, 83.9% had tenure of 0-10 years in their current job, and 64.2% had tenure of 0-10 years with their current organisation.

The respondents for the current application of HR competencies (Manuscript 4) were HR officers and managers from various organisations in the private and public sector who had knowledge about HRM processes in the workplace. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and provide the desired information. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed with, of which 483 were returned. A total of 481 questionnaires were usable for analysis. This represented a 60.13% response rate. The demographics of the respondents in this sample were as follows: 55.1% were women, 70.5% spoke indigenous languages, and 76.9% were black Africans. A total of 29.5% of the respondents were aged 30-39 years, 35.8% held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational qualification, and 31.1% were employed on middle management level. Of the respondents, 37.8% had six to 15 years' work experience 83.8% had tenure of 0 to 10 years in their current job, and 64% had tenure of 0-10 years with their current organisation.

1.8.2.3 Data Collection

The HRM Professional Competence Model (Schutte, 2015) was developed to assess HR competencies in South African workplaces. The processes of developing this model and measure and the final validation thereof are described in the manuscripts that form part of this thesis.

1.8.2.4 Research procedure

Permission was obtained from the necessary authorities prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hard-copy surveys were distributed to the relevant participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the administration of the surveys. Confidentiality was maintained at all times.

1.8.2.5 Recording of data

The data were captured in an Excel spread sheet and exported to the SPSS and EQS programs for data analyses. The data will be stored at a safe place for at least ten years.

1.8.2.6 Data analyses

The data were analysed with the aid of SPSS (2015) and EQS (2015). Exploratory factor analyses and confirmatory factor analyses were used to uncover the factor structure of the hypothesised model. Construct equivalence of the instrument was determined (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). These techniques were applied to obtain a structure in each language group, which could then be compared across all language groups involved. Factor analysis was used to determine construct equivalence (Field 2009). In the current study, both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis were performed. Factors obtained in each group were compared (after target rotation). The agreement was evaluated by a factor congruence coefficient, Tucker's phi (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Values above 0.90 were considered to indicate essential agreement between cultural groups, while values above 0.95 were considered to indicate very good agreement. A high agreement implies that the factor loadings of the lower and higher levels are equal up to a multiplying constant, (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

The following goodness-of-fit indices were utilised for confirmatory factor analyses, (see Field, 2009): chi-squared statistic and degrees of freedom; two absolute fit measures, namely the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR); and two incremental fit measures, namely the non-normed fit index (NNFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). The guidelines of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) were used as an indication of acceptable model fit for the HRM professional competence model: chi-squared statistic, $2 \leq \chi^2$ to $Df \geq 5$; CFI $\geq .90$; NNFI ≥ 0.90 ; SRMR 0.08 or less (with CFI above 0.92); RMSEA < 0.07 (with a CFI of 0.90 or higher).

MANOVA was used to determine the significance of differences between the HRM practitioner groups and HRM competencies. MANOVA tests whether mean differences among groups on a combination of dependent variables are likely to have occurred by chance

(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In MANOVA, a new dependent variable that maximizes group differences is created from the set of dependent variables. One-way analysis is then performed on the newly created dependent variable. Wilks's lambda was used to test the significance of the effects. Wilk's lambda is a likelihood ratio statistic that tests the likelihood of data under the assumption of equal population mean vectors for all groups against the likelihood, under the assumption that the population mean vectors are identical to those of the sample mean vectors for different groups. When an effect is significant in MANOVA, analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to discover which dependent variables are affected (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Because multiple ANOVAs were used, a Bonferroni-type adjustment was made for inflated Type 1 errors.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research followed the ethical guidelines prescribed by the Postgraduate Manual of North-West University. These include, amongst others, informed consent, the right to privacy, and that no harm may come to research participants.

1.10 CHAPTER DIVISIONS

The chapters in this thesis are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2 (Manuscript 1) - The intricacies of HRM as a managerial profession in South Africa

Chapter 3 (Manuscript 2): The development of a HRM Professional Competence Model — a pilot study

Chapter 4 (Manuscript 3): Validation of a HRM Professional Competence Model for the South African context

Chapter 5 (Manuscript 1): The current application of HR competencies in the South African context

Chapter 6: Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations

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Chapter 2:

MANUSCRIPT 1

INTRICACIES OF HRM AS A MANAGERIAL PROFESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

Orientation: The extent to which HRM can be considered a profession in the South African context remains an on-going debate.

Research purpose: The main objective of the present research was to draw upon the literature on the progression of professionalisation of and professionalism in HRM in general, as well as practices that could be adopted specifically within the South African context.

Motivation for the study: HR practitioners play an important role in the strategic operation of any organisation. This requires skilled and competent professional individuals who can add value to a dynamic, changing work environment.

Research approach, design, and method: This manuscript is presented in the format of a literature review.

Main findings: From the literature review, it was deduced that, by developing and inculcating a governing body with legal status and a body of knowledge, as well as establishing standards for all HR practices at all organisational levels, the current South African HR fraternity will gain common understandings of the nature of the role of the HR professional, which ought to then be applied to all vocational settings.

Practical/managerial implications: This article provides an in-depth discussion of professionalism and professionalisation, and demonstrates how these apply to the current South African HRM context. Other discussions of professionalism in the context of HRM have, at best, drawn upon simplistic dictionary definitions of the terms *profession*, *professional*, and *professionalise*.

Contribution/Value-add: Analysis of the literature as the ontological methodology highlighted the significance, guiding principles, and anticipated conduct of professionals in general and, particularly, of HRM practitioners in South Africa.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Management Profession, Professional bodies, Professionalism

INTRODUCTION

The status of the HRM occupation and its standing as a managerial profession has been a persisting matter for academics, researchers, and practitioners over time (van Rensburg, 2010; Pohler & Willness, 2014). In recent years, scholars and practitioners have increasingly acknowledged the importance of competent human capital management for optimal organisational performance (Boudreau & Lawler, 2014). This is supported by Lawler (2003), who argued that there is growing responsiveness of organisations in paying increasing attention to the importance of human capital in organisational effectiveness. It is increasingly recognised that HR plays a key role in developing and implementing corporate strategy, and is high value-adding part of organisations. This led to the current global debate, as is the case in South Africa, on the advantages in the HRM discipline being transformed into a profession. However, it would be unavoidable for the HR fraternity in its quest to gain legitimacy and a good reputation not to face various obstacles. According to Ulrich (1997, p. 251) “the need for improved professional status might just become pivotal.”

Scholars and practitioners worldwide are currently debating whether HRM should be regarded as a profession and, if so, what the characteristics of the profession should be. Scholars like Losey (1997, p. 147) argued that “human resource management is a profession.” Furthermore, Ulrich and Eichinger (1998) maintained that “HR must become more professional.” Numerous researchers and scholars in the HR field (see Armstrong, 2000; Losey, Meisinger, & Ulrich, 2005; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005) and institutions (i.e. Harvard, Cornell, and the American Business Association) use the term *HR professional* in their writings.

The South African Human Resources Management Society could learn from experience gained in the international HR or people management discipline (Van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2011). At one time, HR practitioners found themselves facing a similar credibility crisis to that currently faced by many impact assessment practitioners. Wright (2008) asserted that there is agreement amongst researcher, scholars, and practitioners that the path to an improved status for HR practitioners involved reinvention of their role as business

partners and internal consultants stimulating business competitiveness. Another view shared by many authors is that HR practitioners need to adopt the characteristics of the classic professions and be more professional.

At one stage, HRM was referred to as ‘personnel management,’ and, at that time, largely fulfilled an administrative role and, to some degree, a welfare function within the workplace (Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005). Personnel management qualifications’ curricula were also drawn from a wide range of disciplines, mainly from within the social sciences, particularly industrial psychology. Commencing with a discussion at the Institute of Personal Management in 1973, the issue of professionalisation eventually culminated in the establishment, in 1981, of what finally became known as the SABPP (van Rensburg, 2010, p. 25).

The current view of the status of HRM will be examined in the present study, with reference to the views of scholars and researchers, specifically in the South African context. However, before this is attempted, it is necessary to define the terms *profession* and *professionalism*, and describe why fit would be of significance in HRM becoming a profession.

Furthermore, through reference to the literature, we question the dynamics informing the composition of the practitioners working in HR, taking into account the meaning of the terms *professionalism*, *semi-profession*, *professionalisation*, and the characteristics of a profession.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising the term *profession*

The term *profession* emerged in the early 1950s from the sociological studies of professions by Everett Hughes, who attempted to position the social recognition and status of professions (Louw, 1990, p. 9). During the 1970s, Freidson (2004) once more open the debate around the term *profession*, defining it as founded on independent practice, self-examining processes, expert knowledge, and special value in the occupation, as well as a monopoly of the service

to the public. Hall (cited in Williams, Onsmann, & Brown, 2010) suggested that professions are based on a professional model, which describes accompanying attributes and profession-specific content.

Several decades later, scholars, researchers, and practitioners are still in disagreement on what exactly the terms *profession*, *professionalisation*, and *professional* refer to (Harrison, 2007). Table 2.1, below, provides a summary of the most prominent definitions of the concept of a profession.

Table 2.1: Definitions of Profession

Author	Description
Abdulla and Threadgold (2008; 2010)	<i>Profession</i> is a term that denotes a domain of expertise.
Friedson (1970)	“an occupation which has assumed a dominant position in a division of labour, so that it gains control over the determination of the substance of its own work (p.48).”
Hodson and Sullivan (2012)	“A profession is a knowledge-based occupation with prominent status that is structured around four primary characteristics: specialized knowledge, autonomy, and authority over other subordinate occupational groups, and a degree of altruism” (p. 282).
Hughes (1988,	“A profession refers to the act or fact of professing. In other words, a duty that one ‘professes’ to be competent in and to follow, and in so doing possessing clear features in order to provide valuable services to clients under rigorously stipulated conditions (p. 31).”

**(Maudsley &
Strivens, 2000)**

“a profession is a vocation ... founded upon an understanding of the theoretical structure of some department of learning or science, and upon the abilities accompanying such understanding ... applied to the vital practical affairs of man. The practices ... are modified by knowledge of a generalized nature and by the accumulated wisdom and experience of mankind ... The profession ... considers its first ethical imperative to be altruistic to the client (p. 535).”

Pellegrino (2002)

According to its etymological roots, the term *profession* signifies to declare aloud, to proclaim something publicly. With this view as a source, professionals brand a profession as an exclusive kind of activity and conduct to which they commit themselves, and to which they can be expected to conform. The essence of a profession, then, is this deed of ‘profession’ — of promise, commitment, and dedication to an ideal.

**Ritzer and Walczak
(1986, p. 6)**

“It is an occupation that has had the power to have undergone a development process enabling it to acquire or convince significant others ... that it has acquired a collection of characteristics we have come to accept as representing a profession.”

Considering the above conceptualisations of a profession, we concur that a profession is

“...an occupation based upon specialised study, training or experience, the purpose of which is to apply skilled service or advice to others, or to provide technical, managerial or administrative services to, or within, organisations in return for a fee or salary” (Cheetham & Chivers, 2005, p. xii).

An illustrative timeline on the theories of the characteristics of a profession are presented in Figure 2.1, below.

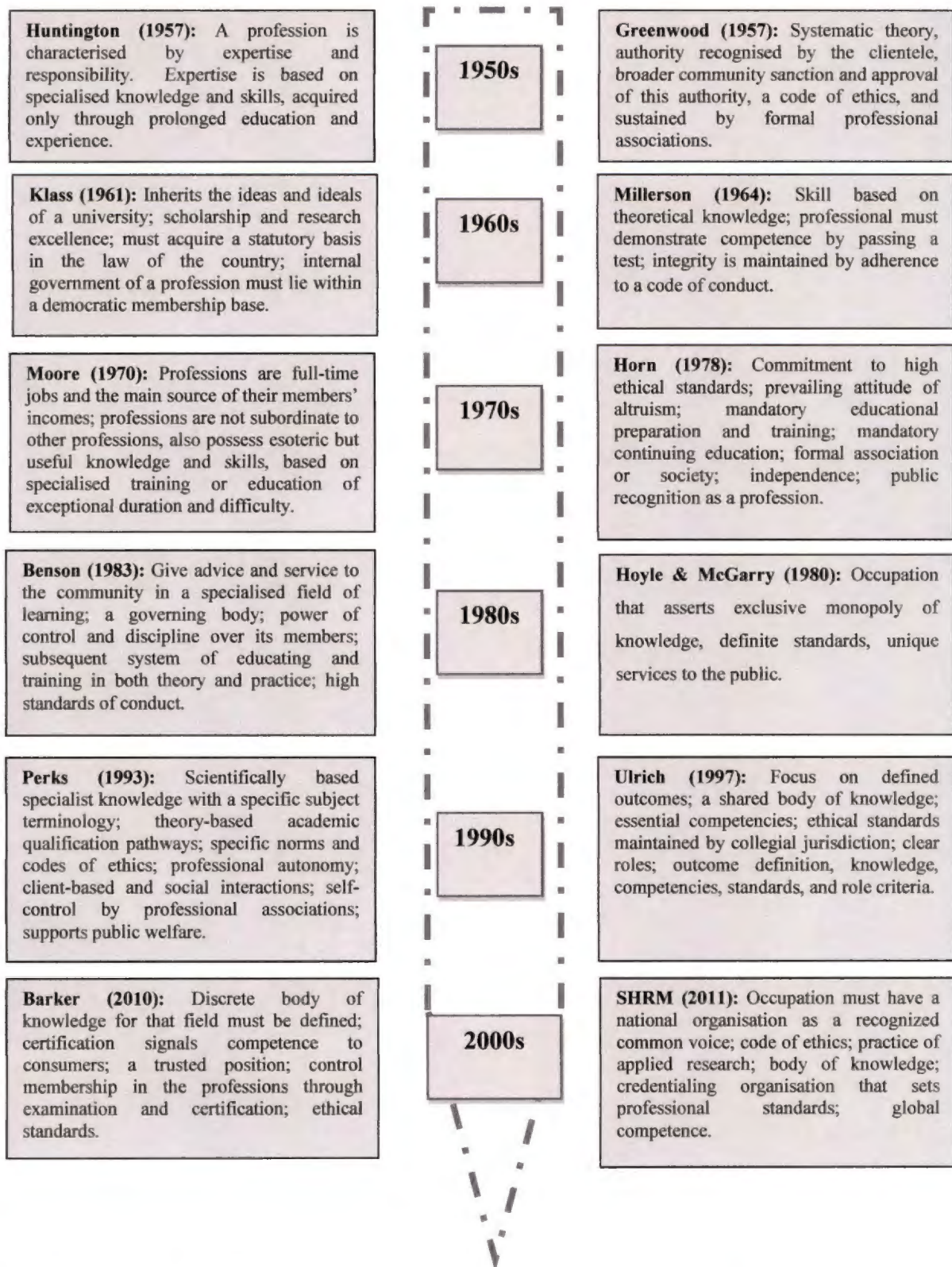


Figure 2.1: An Illustrative timeline of the development of the concept of a profession (Author's own)

Despite some incongruence in the conceptualisation of a profession, scholars are in agreement that a number of requirements must be in place for a profession to be recognised as such, including the following (see Hodson & Sullivan, 2012; Rice & Duncan, 2006; van Rensburg, 2010; Welie, 2004):

- a defined, common body of complex knowledge, together with a set of common skills;
- an autonomous, self-regulating national professional guild or association, in most cases set up through an Act of parliament;
- a certification programme through which the professional qualification can be achieved;
- a code of ethics to guide the behaviour of members of the profession; and
- a social contract between the custodians of the profession and the trusting public.

In the following section, we discuss the extent to which the field of HRM can be considered a profession.

HRM as a profession

HRM has strived to affirm itself as an influential and regulatory profession based on a body of applied knowledge, whose objective it is to help regulate human activities within organisations (Brabet, 1993; De Coster, 1998). For certain authors and researchers, this body of knowledge is built on “two pillars, strategic management and organisational behaviour” (Cabral-Cardoso, 2000, p. 225), while for others it is the result of the contributions made by the so-called “employment sciences” (De Coster, 1998, p. 23), with specific significance for economics, sociology, and psychology.

However, both views seem unable to accommodate the array of theoretical and methodological contributions that HRM has drawn on in its attempt to respond to an increasingly complex reality, as many authors, in fact, pointed out. Gilbert (2000, p. 10) asserted that “human resources management is strongly anchored in the human sciences and drawing most of its inspiration thereof.” Guest and Zing (2004, p. 404) asserted that the

conceptualisation necessary for HRM should increasingly be anchored in a “broad ranging knowledge of the social sciences.” Watson (2004) advocated a more analytical approach to HRM by adopting critical theory perspectives.

The Society of Human Resources Management conducted a worldwide survey to benchmark the state of the HR discipline (Claus & Collison, 2005). This study used Eliot Freidson’s (2001) six dimensions of professionalism namely: (1) a body of knowledge and skills derived from abstract concepts and theories, (2) recognition as a profession, (3) professional autonomy and internal control, (4) an occupationally controlled labour market requiring training credentials for entry and career mobility, (5) an ideology of service, and (6) limited external controls. Claus and Collison (2005, p. 19) concluded that “there is still a lot of room left for the maturing of HR in terms of the various dimensions of professionalism,” and that HR professionals did not feel that they were held in high esteem by their organisations.

Follow-up studies by Fanning (2011) uncovered nine features that define the field of HR in its drive towards professionalism in the USA and the United Kingdom. These included (1) a governing body, (2) certification, education, and training, (3) a body of knowledge, (4) a code of ethics and discipline, (5) legal status, (6) a research base, (7) independence, (8) making a contribution to society, and (9) recognition. Brief descriptions of these characteristics are presented in the next section.

Governing body. The role of the professional body may be instrumental in defining the body of knowledge and enhancing the legitimacy of a field (Lounsbury, 2002, Tyson, 1999; Wiley, 2000). The regulation of members for the protection of the public is one of the most important functions professional associations declare to deliver (Van Hoy, 1993). Association membership may be mandatory, association participation is extensive, and formal interaction and communication are highly developed (Greenwood *et al.*, 2002; Farndale & Brewster, 2005).

Moreover, the governing body has to have control over and uphold discipline amongst its members (Benson, 1983). Professional bodies and associations have a legitimising role to play in establishing a specialist body of knowledge, regulating practice, and providing a

source of internal and external identity for practitioners (Farndale & Brewster, 2005). Farndale and Brewster (2005) further postulated that a profession is a service provided, using a variety of specialised skills, on the bases of theoretical or scientific knowledge, regulated by a professional organisation. Autonomy from government- and outside intervention is ensured by the professional association, giving society a moral guarantee, as prescribed by a code of professional ethics.

Code of ethics and discipline. Most professions have codes of ethics that articulate the ideal relationship between the professional, the client, and the community (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012). Rules of conduct or practice and restrictions imposed by a professional body should be designed, not to protect the interests of the members, but to protect the interests of or enhance the level of service to the public (Benson, 1983). True professions have codes of conduct, and the meaning and consequences of those codes are taught as part of the formal education of their members. A governing body, composed of respected members of the profession, oversees members' compliance. Through these codes, professional institutions forge an implicit social contract with other members of society: 'Trust us to exercise control and exercise jurisdiction over this important occupational category.' In return, the profession promises: 'We will ensure that our members are worthy of your trust — that they will not only be competent to perform the tasks they have been entrusted with, but that they will conduct themselves according to high standards and with integrity' (Khurana & Nohria, 2008).

Independence. Independence or autonomy means that professionals rely on their own judgment and knowledge in determining the suitable method of dealing with the problem at hand (Dingwall, 2008). Professionals justify their autonomy through their mastery of the knowledge base. The general public often accepts this autonomy, because they assume that professional education and training are essential to make the relevant decisions. Professional standards reduce autonomy to some degree.

Certification, education, and training. Professionalism seems to be concerned with the knowledge, skills, and procedures involved in the practice of the occupation (Bailey, 2011). Education and training must be constantly updated and modified, so that members can speak

with knowledge and authority on the subjects within their field. Eraut (1994) indicated that professions can use several modes of training, which include the following:

- a period of pupillage or internship, during which students spend a prescribed amount of time learning their craft from an expert;
- enrolment in a professional college outside of the higher education system;
- a qualifying examination, normally set by a qualifying association for the occupation;
- a period of relevant study at a college, polytechnic, or university, leading to a recognised academic qualification; and
- the collection of evidence of practical competence in the form of a logbook or portfolio.

Legal status. Nearly all professions require licensing by the state, and only those who qualify with educational credentials and have passed the board examination can receive certification. From time to time, additional requirements may be added to the registration requirements or for undergoing further training. Most professions are protected by laws that make it illegal to practise without a formal licence (Lawrence, 2004). However, some professionals — such as scientists — although unlicensed, are basically unemployable without formal educational qualifications. Either through licensing or through convincing employers to hire only trained graduates, the profession can act collectively to restrict access to its knowledge base (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012).

Contribution to society. According to Barker (2010), professional bodies hold a trusted position. They have, in effect, a contract with society at large. They regulate membership in the professional society through examination and certification, maintain the quality of certified members through on-going training and the enforcement of ethical standards, and may exclude anyone who fails to meet those standards. Society is rewarded for its trust with a quality of service that it would otherwise be unable to ensure (Barker, 2010).

Body of knowledge. For a professional body in any given field to function, a discrete body of knowledge for that field must be defined, and the field's boundaries must be established (Barker, 2010). In addition, there must be reasonable consensus within the field as to what the knowledge should consist of. According to Hodson and Sullivan (2012), the knowledge

base of a profession consists of three parts. The first part is theoretical knowledge. This knowledge is typically acquired at a university. The second part of the knowledge base is meticulous, practical information that can be applied in serving a client. The professional must stay well-informed of these developments to provide the best service to clients. The third part of the knowledge base — technique (or process) — is the application of the knowledge base. Techniques are learned in an applied or clinical portion of a professional training programme. Technique can be learned or refined during an internship as a mentee of a more experienced professional. The internship or residency after basic medical training is devoted to learning techniques specific to an area of specialization.

Research. Volti (2008) postulated that both professional societies and groups strive to increase and refine the profession's knowledge base. The associations may lobby for public funding for research to be conducted by the faculty of the professional schools. The results of the research — new knowledge and techniques — reach the members through professional journals. Professional associations or professional schools publish these journals, available to members through subscriptions and specialised libraries. Formal continuing education is provided through conferences, videos, audiocassettes, compact discs, web-based systems, and electronic mail (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012).

Recognition. Abdulla and Threadgold (2010), Paré and Tremblay (2007), and Horn (1978) stated that public recognition is a significant antecedent of the status of profession, although they recognized the limitations with regard to how it is defined and measured, and questioned whether the public at large should decide whether or not it is a profession.

Fanning (2011) viewed the above characteristics as dimensions by which one could measure HRM's progress along the road to professionalisation. Fanning (2011), used the term *semi-professional* to refer to the intermediate stage in the evolution from a 'low professional' state (an occupation) to a 'high professional' state (a true profession). Fanning concluded that the HR occupation was semi-professional, in so far as it scored high on many of the nine dimensions of a profession, but not on all. Furthermore the author alluded to the fact that the current practice of HR does not require a licence, and that expulsion from the governing body would not prohibit an individual from practising.

HRM as a semi-profession

Although HR is no longer 'just' an occupation, many would say that it is not yet a true profession. According to Hodson and Sullivan (2012), a semi-profession represents occupational groups that display some characteristics of a profession, and are, therefore, in the process of professionalisation. More specifically, the term *semi-profession* is used to refer to an occupation that has some attributes of a profession, but is not considered a 'true' profession (Fanning, 2011).

Although all occupations have a body of knowledge, semi-professions usually do not control theirs or have prerequisites for access. Many semi-professions have codes of ethics and disciplinary rules enforced by their professional associations. However, unlike the established professions, their associations are less likely to be politically powerful, for fear of offending major employers. As a result, most semi-professionals' organisations still lack the autonomy and organised power held by those of professions.

The interesting question is whether the threshold for the professionalisation process in HR will be a semi-profession or a 'true' profession? With regard to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's (AACTE's) list of criteria, the HR discipline is currently still displaying many of the characteristics of a semi-profession; however, many of the more recent changes in the HR profession point to a semi-profession that is striving to become a true profession. In other words, the focus for the HR fraternity will increasingly shift towards becoming a 'true' profession.

Professionalisation of HRM

As far back as 1964, Millerson defined *professionalisation* as the process by which an occupation undergoes transformation to become a profession. Hoyle (1975) used the term *professionalism* to refer to individual aspects such as the behaviours, attitudes, and values characteristic of members of a professional group. Freidson (2004) argued that an attribute of a profession is that its logic is based on the specific, complex professional action of a professional group. Professionals are typified by their self-organisation and self-regulation. In a similar vein, Hodson and Sullivan (2012) stated that professionalisation can be

understood as the effort by an occupational group to raise its collective standing by taking on the characteristics of a profession.

According to Gieseke (2010), professionalisation could also be viewed as a development practice within the HR context. This development practice focuses on two different perspectives: one perspective refers to professionalisation as the development practice that grows a profession, and the other perspective understands professionalisation as a development practice of growing the professionalism of people working in a specific field. Lauk and Pallas (2008) maintained that an occupational group such as HR practitioners must construct and maintain occupational boundaries that consist of social or cultural divisions that help to indicate the group's work, societal roles, and legitimacy. The boundary activities consist of defining specific work tasks and normative occupational values, determining professional standards, influencing education, and recruiting new members. A professional organisation should have the legal right to control its field and oppose external interference that attempts to control the activities of the occupation's constituents (Lauk & Pallas, 2008).

Based on this sociological discussion, professionalisation would include developing a joint framework of HR within South Africa as an established profession. South Africa's SABPP, one of the first establishments with an institutionalised educational framework for HR educators setting standards for HR practitioners, has made several efforts to develop HRM in South Africa as a profession. Borrowing from these definitions, we can define the professionalisation of HRM as the process by which HR practitioners collectively strive to achieve the recognition and status that is conferred on the established professions by matching or adopting the defining characteristics of the established professions.

According to Williams, Onsmann, and Brown (2009), professionalisation progresses linearly towards acquiring a number of essential characteristics like codes of ethics, professional associations, and specialised skills. Professions should move through four stages, in chronological order, during the process of professionalisation. These states are: creating full-time occupations, establishing training schools, establishing professional bodies, and developing codes of ethics. Abdullah and Threadgold (2010) indicated that the process of professionalisation also includes promoting the occupation to national and international

parties, and obtaining professional licences and accreditation.

Hall (cited in Swailes, 2003) stated that it is important to understand the individual professional member's view of a profession. Hall proposed five elements of professionalism: the use of a professional organisation as major referent, a belief in public service, a belief in self-regulation, a sense of calling, and a feeling of autonomy. Cunningham (2008) pointed out that professionals are deemed to be service-orientated, which is interpreted as being trustworthy, the suggestion being that inherent in professionalism is trust, a term generally regarded as an ethical issue. The professional is given legitimacy through the development of the client–professional relationship; the professional also has to build a relationship with the professional body.

Based on these definitions and the above discussion, HR professionals should be able to adequately deal with real-world situations. In other words, HR professionals should be able to put on 'professional glasses' through which they can see situations clearly from the perspective of HR. Therefore, a professional action always needs to be an interpretation of the situation by an HR professional with scientific knowledge. HR professional action is characterised by an adequate (not a predetermined) way of acting in a specific situation. Professionalism in this sense means the practitioner must have a holistic understanding of the situation in which the HR professional performance is taking place, and deal with it on the basis of combined competence (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).

Professionalisation entails educating people working in HR towards the goal of professionalisation by creating a culture of professional conduct by the people working in HR. With this professionalism, a further improvement of the quality of HRM can be achieved by the professionals. Where the term *professionalisation* is used in this article, it means a process towards professionalism.

HRM as a profession in South Africa

The evolution of the HRM field in South Africa took place over three major periods: personnel management, industrial relations, and strategic HRM (Venter & Barkhuizen, 2005). The function of HRM in the South African context has developed over many years. During the 1930s, it started off as an employee welfare-orientated service. The focus steadily towards a more management- and business focussed 'personnel management' function during the 1940s. This refocus continued until the 1980s; at that point, *human resource management*' arose as the term of choice. However, organisations and industry were increasingly developing expectations with respect to HR practitioners. HR practitioners were expected to display the required proficiency to significantly influence organisational success, measured by bottom-line results. By the 1990s, this proficiency viewpoint had become the test of credibility and success of HRM and its practitioners (Swanepoel, Erasmus, Van Wyk & Schenk, 2003).

The move towards professional status in South Africa also started to become apparent in many occupations, and the attention seemed to expand as evolving industrialisation increased the demand for more advanced methods and techniques. These developments also influenced the HR fraternity in South Africa, and the occupation has received general recognition as a specialised aspect of management; however, the matter is nowhere near final solution (Swanepoel et al., 2003).

Currently, there are two main role players in South Africa that guide the professionalisation of HR practitioners. The Institute for People Management (IPM) was established in 1945 to enhance the competence of HR practitioners. The ensuing section provides an analysis of Legg (2004) of the history of professionalisation of HRM in South Africa, from 1945 to 1995.

The IPM was found in 1945, in recognition of the importance of HR professionalism in South Africa. However, since its inception, no effort was made to establish a disciplined approach to the professionalisation of HRM and training. Furthermore, membership appeared to be *ad hoc*, with no specific requirements with regard to acknowledgement of professional status (see Legg, 2004).

This, however, changed when the IPM developed a set of criteria in 1964, and eventually obtained recognition as an *ad hoc* committee for professional recognition of personnel practitioners in 1977. At the time, professionalisation was perceived as part of the answer to the challenge of unfolding events in South Africa. It was foreseen that greater importance would need to be placed on training and industrial relations. The IPM also had to deal with two major requirements prior to recognition as a profession: (i) appropriate levels of education and training of candidates to attain the necessary standards of competence prior to being granted membership of the discipline of HRM and (ii) a code of behaviour that would formalise the necessary ethical obligations of members (see Legg, 2004).

The IPM, furthermore, paved the way for the launch of the SABPP in 1981. Whilst the IPM encouraged and developed practitioners through a variety of activities, the SABPP concentrated on setting standards, registration, education, training, and professional conduct. The SABPP focused more on personnel practice and the distinctive role of the functional specialist. As part of this function, it registered practitioners in two categories, namely practitioner and technician, according to regulations and a set of qualifying standards. The IPM, in contrast, had the much wider task of establishing the personnel/HRM practice. Although the IPM had two levels of membership, full and associate, it based membership on less stringent qualifications. The IPM formulated its own code of conduct as a guide to members, but this existed in name only, as it could not be enforced. The SABPP, like other professional bodies, employed a disciplinary system where loss of registration through misconduct could be a serious setback for professionals. As registration with the SABPP is voluntary, there is no statutory support of disciplinary action that would mean the loss of the right to practise, as is the case with, e.g., accountant (see Legg, 2004).

The SABPP restructured itself in 1987, to become more representative of the employer community. The membership of the board displays that it started to operate independently of the IPM, although the two bodies were still closely aligned. In July 1989, the SABPP made important adjustments to the regulations governing registration, which allowed for greater recognition of experience, as opposed to the earlier emphasis on academic qualifications. The amendment followed representations by those who felt greater recognition needed to be offered to experience in the early stages of the formation of the SABPP. This adjustment

accommodated the appeal, especially by black persons, who had experience but not the required academic qualifications, of which, they maintained, they were deprived for historical reasons; they had only been able to obtain academic knowledge through part-time courses. This revision allowed such persons to register as practitioners, and not be limited to lower technician status. The amendment was a turnaround on statements made a year earlier, where it was declared that there would be no lowering of registrations standards. The amendment did reduce professional standards, but, as a concession, it allowed the accommodation of previously disadvantaged persons, and illustrated the dilemma of the professionalising process in South Africa (see Legg, 2004).

From the above, it is clear that both the IPM and SABPP have done valuable work in the advancement of HRM as a profession, and continue to evolve. However, the question remains whether both institutions can be recognised as full professional bodies within South Africa. Table 2.2 below provides a comparison of the professional status of the IPM and the SABPP in terms of the criteria set out by Fanning (2011).

Table 2.2: Comparison of the IPM and SABPP regarding Professional Status

Requirements	IPM	SABPP
Governing body	No	No
Code of ethics	Yes	Yes
Independence	Limited	Limited
Certification, education & training	Yes	Yes
Legal status	No	No
Contribution to society	Limited	Limited
Body of knowledge	Limited	Limited
Research	Limited	Limited
Recognition	No	No

The comparison in Table 2.2 shows that the IPM and SABPP can only be considered as semi-professional at this point in time. The findings, however, are promising, as both the SABPP and IPM are continuously reinventing themselves to achieve full professional status. For

example, the SABPP is currently concentrating on a seamless continued professional development system, and is involved in on-going research (van Rensburg, Basson, & Carrim, 2010).

Implications of professionalisation for HR practitioners

The implications of professionalisation for HR practitioners are significant for the design and education of HR professionals and how they position themselves within their companies. For example, is their profession similar to other professions within the organisation, whose practitioners serve the company but also are held to the standards of practice of their profession (such as lawyers and accountants), or are they general managers who should meet the needs of the business without regard for their profession's code of ethics? Is HR education a process of discovery that is learned, rather than taught, or is it about mastering a set body of knowledge?

Barker (2010) asserted that business education is more about acquiring the skill of integration and decision-making across various functional areas, groups of people, and circumstances than about mastering a set body of knowledge. It takes place in the minds of the student rather than in the content of programme modules. Professional education enables an individual to master the body of knowledge deemed requisite for practice. It is about educating an individual with little or no knowledge, in order to become qualified. Business education is typically post-experience, meaning that participants are not novices. An MBA programme offers an opportunity to share, conceptualise, and better understand workplace experiences; to build on the skill of working with others; and to open up new career opportunities. To admit only students with little or no work experience, as the professions normally do, would be to misunderstand the nature and purpose of the learning experience. A second difference is that, although professional education is concerned exclusively with the individual, a quality business education depends, in a distinctive way, on the peer group. No candidate can be effectively evaluated independently of all the other candidates. Because a student at a business school has a direct impact on the learning of others, the strongest class is likely to be the strongest combination of individuals. This is because business education is not about mastering a body of knowledge (Barker, 2010).

There are those commentators who argue that HR as a profession should have its own standards, qualifications, and ethics. This would presumably allow HR professionals to refuse to do things that the senior management team of the organisation requests, if these are in contravention of accepted HR standards (in the same way legal or financial experts might). There are those who argue that the effective HR specialist should have the skills to be able to act in the HR arena in such a way that it enables the senior management team to fulfil whatever strategic direction has been chosen (Brewster *et al.*, 2000). Are these two roles compatible, or are they mutually exclusive?

CONCLUSION

The professionalisation of HRM in South Africa has been a goal since the turn of the 20th century (see van Rensburg, 2010). HR associations in South Africa, such as the IPM and SABPP, have invested considerable effort to both legitimise and professionalise HR practice by expanding the profession's body of knowledge, improving its reputation and ethical standards, and refining its certification processes (Legg, 2004). As the HR fraternity in South Africa seeks to be recognised at the same level as the major professions, it is clear that it must position itself equally. Whether statutorily mandated or not, a profession remains responsible to set and maintain its own standards.

As identified through this article, a profession provides a service to society, and is therefore legitimised by society, and the professional is recognised as an expert in providing that service. Second, that service and the professional's ability to provide it represent a unique function within society. Third, a profession has a legitimate and recognised governing body, setting its own criteria for entrance to the profession and advancement within its ranks. It also develops its own ethos and standards of behaviour, which it enforces on its members. Equally important to the recognition of HRM as a profession is its ability to develop and evolve its function, expertise, level of responsibility, and ethos, to maintain the profession's value in South African society.

By altering the underpinnings on which its credibility and legitimacy rest, HRM in South Africa will be capable of upholding itself as a business partner at the highest organisational levels — in other words, participate in the formulation of organisational strategies and the

criteria adopted for the attraction and retention of talented individuals to steer organisational success.

Based on the criteria of Fanning (2011) and other authors (Abdulla & Threadgold, 2008; Hodson & Sullivan, 2012) HRM in South Africa can be considered a semi-profession. Currently, the available professional HR bodies are limited in terms of independence, contribution to society, its body of knowledge, and research. Furthermore, the professional bodies lack legal status and recognition by the wider public. As Hodson and Sullivan (2012) postulated, HRM is an occupational group in South Africa that displays some characteristics of a profession, and is, therefore, in the process of professionalisation.

The analyses in this article provide the basis for the following conclusions and recommendations for the professionalisation of HRM in South Africa as depicted in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 Conclusions and Recommendations for HRM as a Profession

Requirements	IPM	SABPP	
Governing body	No	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It appears that both societies do not have as much power and prestige as other traditional professions' representative bodies, and should initiate steps towards formal legislation, whereby only registered practitioners are recognised and considered credible and professional. This could possibly assist in overcoming the lack of credibility in the long run; however, it does not address the current state of affairs. This presents a major challenge, especially if current HR practitioners do perform and add value. • The IPM and SABPP as professional bodies and or associations have a legitimising role to play in forming regulating procedures and providing a source of internal and external identity for practitioners. • Not all employees who perform HRM functions within South African organisation are members of either the SABPP or the IPM. • The regulation of members for the protection of the public is mandatory, and is one of the most important functions that the two associations have to institute in order for members to deliver the expected services. 			

Code of ethics	Yes	Yes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although rules of conduct or practice exist within these two bodies, it should also contain restrictions imposed by them, not to protect the interests of the members, but to protect the interests of the public and to enhance members' level of service. • It must be emphasised that the SABPP, the IPM, and training institutions have a role to play in improving education and training, in order to create greater awareness concerning ethical issues of the HRM profession. The value of a code of ethics as a set of moral guidelines designed to protect the professional, the profession, and the public cannot be overemphasised. • HRM professionals should be required to adhere to the code of ethics, which should include practice standards in the delivery of services to clients, as is required in other professions. • A code of ethics that defines what proper and improper behaviour is that forms the embodiment of the moral standards of a professional service should also be employed. • Greater emphasis should be placed on to the fact that ethics also plays a role in performance management, in that performance is affected by ethical issues, e.g., treating others with respect would influence the interpersonal relationship aspect of performance appraisal. 			
Independence	Limited	Limited	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SABPP and IPM must be sure that members are sufficiently competent to rely on their own judgment as a result of the relevant knowledge of the suitable method for dealing with the problem at hand. • HR professionals must become sufficiently competent to justify their autonomy through their mastery of the knowledge base. • The associations must put professional standards in place to standardize norms and practices of practitioners. 			
Certification, education & training	Yes	Yes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational institutions could encourage participation in professional activities by establishing, in conjunction with the SABPP and the IPM, student forums and associations, which will, in turn, increase awareness of the latest trends and developments. • Educational institutions should, further, aim to structure curricula and activities in alignment with SABPP and IPM requirements. This will not only create greater awareness in and motivate practitioners to register, but will also emphasise the importance of adhering to professional conduct. • The implementation of internship programmes must become compulsory, during which students must spend a required amount of time learning their craft from an expert, and compile a portfolio evidencing their experience. • The SABPP and IPM should set a qualifying examination that is a prerequisite for membership. • The professional body has to require an academic qualification obtained through a college, polytechnic, or university. 			

Legal status	No	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, the IPM and the SABPP do not have legal status whereby the HR profession requires licensing by the state, and only those who possess the necessary educational credentials and pass an examination can receive certification. • The implementation of continuous professional development programme, where additional requirements could be updated from time to time, along with the professionals being brought up to date on the registration requirements, should become mandatory. • The SABPP and IPM should be protected by laws that make it illegal to practise without a formal licence. Other professionals — such as scientists — although unlicensed, are basically unemployable without formal educational qualifications, because employers will not hire them. • Either through licensing or through persuading employers to hire only trained graduates, the profession can act collectively to restrict access to its knowledge base. 			
Contribution to society	Limited	Limited	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current professional HR bodies must be recognised by government.. • They ought to have a psychological contract with society at large. • Trust relationships must be built with their respective communities through the control of membership of the HR professional society via examination and certification. • The quality of certified members through ongoing training and the enforcement of ethical standards should be ensured. • Society will be protected against harm caused by misconduct of practitioners who are not qualified to practise. 			
Body of knowledge	Limited	Limited	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main role would be one of education and awareness creation amongst current and future HR practitioners concerning the SABPP and the IPM and their missions, objectives, benefits, registration criteria, etc., thereby encouraging registration and membership. • The IPM and SABPP should establish a clear body of knowledge, distinctive to the profession, which can be acquired through a system of professional education and training. • A clear set of criteria clarifying professional expertise and how it is attained should be established. • The body of knowledge should make clear the competencies required of HRM professionals. 			

Research	Limited	Limited	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the IPM and SABPP should focus on research to increase and refine the professionals' knowledge base. • The associations may try to influence government in order to obtain some funding towards research, in conjunction with universities. Such research should lead to new knowledge and practices. • The research could be published in accredited professional journals and made available to members through subscriptions and specialized libraries. • Formal continuing education could also be provided through conferences, videos, compact discs, web-based systems, and electronic mail. • Formal forums could also be instituted, through which members can discuss topical issues and obtain practical solutions. 			
Recognition	No	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public recognition must be promoted, due to the fact that it is a significant precursor to professionalisation. • The current public perception with regard to HRM as a profession should be ascertained. • IPM and SABPP should work towards creating one body recognised by the community, which will define HR measures and standards. 			

In conclusion, the evolution of HRM to a profession is far from concluded. The literature is divided about whether HRM is a profession. However, as the nature of HRM constantly changes, technology continues to grow, and world politics and socially acceptable behaviour continually evolve, it is critical that HRM becomes a fully-fledged profession. This suggests that, for the South African HRM community to become a profession, it must uphold and evolve its ethical standards, which will help HR practitioners to achieve and maintain the occupation's status as a profession and its value to society. To successfully become a full profession and formally establish its position in society would require the inculcation of personal and professional virtues, both collectively, under a single professional body, and individually as unique HR practitioners in the service of their communities.

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Chapter 3:

MANUSCRIPT 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HRM PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE MODEL — A PILOT STUDY

ABSTRACT

Orientation. Despite inroads made by research on professional HRM competencies, measures of these competencies remain scant.

Research purpose. The main objective of this research was to develop and test a diagnostic tool for the measurement of professional HRM competencies.

Motivation for the study. HR practitioners play an important role in the strategic operation of any organisation. This requires skilled and competent individuals who can add value to a dynamic, changing work environment.

Research approach, design, and method. A quantitative research approach was followed, using the steps of the DeVellis's scale development process. An HRM competence measure was developed and piloted among HR practitioners and managers ($N = 189$).

Main findings. Exploratory factor analyses resulted in three distinguishable competency dimensions for HR professionals: *Professional behaviour and leadership* (with the factors of Leadership- personal credibility, Organisational capability, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication, and Citizenship); *Service orientation and execution* (with the factors of Talent management, HR governance, Analytics and measurement, and HR service delivery); and *Business intelligence* (with the factors of Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, and HR technology). All factors showed excellent reliabilities.

Practical/managerial implications: The measures can be applied to assess the current competence of HR practitioners, and can be used to determine corrective action where necessary.

Contribution/Value-add: The present study contributed a new model for the measurement of HRM competencies.

Key words: Business intelligence, HRM competencies, professional behaviour and leadership, service orientation and execution

INTRODUCTION

Today's global economic uncertainty, technological changes, increasing customer demands, demographic transitions, and industry mergers force business leaders and HR practitioners to focus more on HR issues than ever before (De Nisi, Wilson, & Biteman, 2014; Jiang, Lepak, Han, Hong, Kim, *et al.*, 2014). Several authors maintain that a competency-based approach to HRM is most effective in a changing workplace (Ulrich, Brockbank, Younger, & Ulrich, 2013). This involves the leveraging of human capital in organisations, as opposed to the traditional job-based approach. A competency-based approach moves the focus away from jobs toward individuals and their competencies (Ulrich, Allen, Brockbank, Yonger, & Nyman, 2009).

The application of competence models to improve HR practitioners' skill sets is common in the USA; however, it is not common practice within the South African context (Meyer, 2012). A national survey showed that only 20% of South African companies have an HR competence model in place (SABPP Stakeholder Survey, 2011). Organisations generally apply international models to measure HR competence, without taking cognisance of the unique South African context. Several authors have stated that competence models developed in the USA may not be applicable to other countries, because of cultural diversity aspects (Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011). It is therefore imperative that researchers and scholars conduct more studies on HR competencies and their relevance within organisational settings (Caldwell, 2010; Choi, Wan, & Khairuzzaman, 2008; Junaidah, 2007; Ulrich, Brockbank, Johnson, Sandholtz, & Younger, 2008).

The main objective of the present study was to develop and test a diagnostic tool for the assessment of HR professional competencies in the South African context. As stated, most of the HR competence measurements that are currently in use emanated from the USA and Europe. Developing countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and South Africa are following the trend of applying developed countries' measures in an emerging market context (see Abdullah *et al.*, 2011; De Winne, Delmotte, Gilbert, & Sels, 2013; Mamman & Somantri, 2014; Shrimannarayana, 2010; Steyn, 2008; Walters, 2006; Yusoff & Ramayah, 2012). The predominant measure used in the assessment of HRM competencies is the HR Role Questionnaire of Ulrich (1997). Although the measurement proved to be a valid and

reliable measure in the South African context (see Steyn, 2008; Walters, 2006), the HR discipline is in dire need of an empirical measurement that gives a true reflection of the competence requirements of South African HR practitioners. This need is further amplified by the fact that existing research on HR competence is mainly descriptive and fragmentary. As a result, various HR practitioners and stakeholders have different views and expectations of HR practitioners and their roles, and use different criteria to assess their effectiveness. Not only is it important to establish reliable and valid methods of a measurement, it is also important to take cognisance of the cultural diversity of South Africa.

The present article is structured as follows. First, an overview is presented of the conceptual development of the competence measure and its applicability in the South African context. This is followed by the research method applied. Thereafter, the results and a discussion thereof are presented. This article concludes with the value-add of the study and recommendations for future practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HR Competencies Deconstructed

The subject of competencies has been a topic of examination and study since the 1950s. The trend began to gain some momentum through the works introduced by McClelland (1973). Since then, a number of studies have been conducted on the subject, with the research literature primarily focusing on managerial or leadership competencies and competence models. Markus, Thomas, and Allpress, (2005, p. 117) stated that competencies were defined “based on functional role analysis and described either role outcomes or knowledge, skills, and attitudes or both ... and assessed by a behavioral standard.” During the 1980s, Boyatzis, added to the definition of a competency by stating that it is an “underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and or superior performance.” He defined a job competency as “a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self image, or social role, or a body of knowledge” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21).

Kochanski (2009) defined competencies as success factors that enable assessment, feedback, development, and reward of individuals. According to Mansfield, (2005, p. 14), a competency is “an underlying ability or trait, and the behavioral indicators describe specific

ways in which that ability or trait is demonstrated.”

Figure 3.1, below, depicts the symbiotic relationship amongst four categories of factors: the individual’s competencies, the individual’s occupational specifications, the social context, and the HR practitioner’s actions, schemes, and the logic of actions and behaviours. HR practitioners have to ensure their proficiency, in order to meet the organisation’s and people’s needs, and they also have to understand the environment in which they operate.

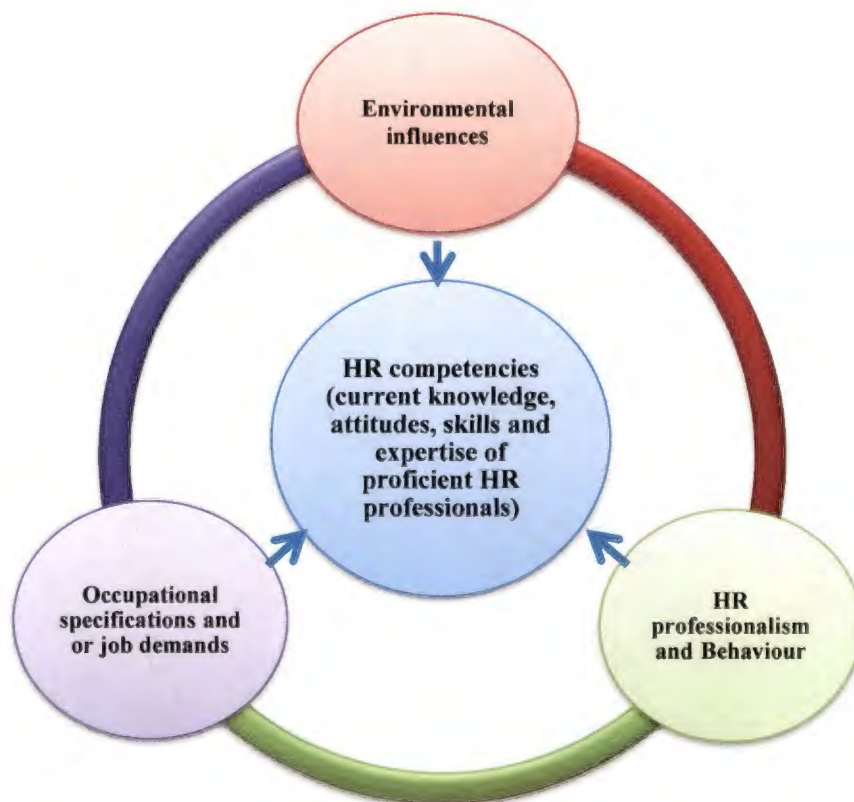


Figure 3.1: Symbiotic Relationship between HR Competencies (Author’s own).

HR Competence Models

The most prominent HR competence model currently used emerged from the USA, and was developed by Ulrich (1997). The original model included four roles, categorised according to their strategic or operational focus and their being business-oriented (‘hard’) or people-oriented (‘soft’). Strategic HR roles include management of transformation and change

(where the HR practitioner is the change agent) and the management of strategic HR (where the HR practitioner is a strategic partner). Operational roles include the management of employees (where the HR practitioner champions the rights of employees), and the administrative function (Ulrich, 1997). This model shows that HR practitioners have to become valued business partners who can actively contribute to organisation's success and competitiveness. This model has now been expanded to include six competencies, namely cultural and change steward, organisational designer, strategic architect, credible activist, business ally, and operation executor (Brockbank & Ulrich, 2008). These competencies have been re-tested in several studies, and some of the competencies descriptions were replaced with newer terminology (see Ulrich, 2012). This competency model serves as a guideline for various global organisations; however, the empirical validity and usefulness of the model remains questionable (O' Brien, 2014; Linehan, 2014).

Lee and Yu (2013) recently highlighted other prominent HR competence models, and advocated HR practitioners adopting the professional behaviour and leadership needed in the 21st century workplace. The Ross School of Business's HR Competency Model identifies six competencies: strategic positioner, credible activist, capacity builder, change champion, HR innovator and integrator, and technology proponent. The Society for Human Resource Management identified nine HR competencies. These are: HR technical expertise and practice, relationship management, consultation, organisational leadership and navigation, global and cultural effectiveness, communication, ethical practice, critical evaluation, and business acumen. Lee and Yu (2013) further emphasised the importance of digital skills, agile thinking, risk leveraging, and global operating skills to enable HR practitioners to deal with organisational and environmental changes.

Applied within the South African context, Walters (2006) compared the competence requirements for HR professionals in South Africa (see Boninelli, 2004; Minervi, 2003) with the relevant competence areas for HR Professionals established by the Michigan studies of leadership. According to the Michigan studies, the foremost HR competency is the ability to manage, supported by personal credibility. Therefore, HR practitioners in South African should be customer-centric, manage alliance partners, display project management skills, and support and facilitate change initiatives. The second competency is the ability of HR

professionals to manage culture. HR professionals have to be champions of employment equity and diversity in South African workplaces, and understand global human capital management. In terms of the delivery of HR practices, HR professionals should display knowledge of the full spectrum of HR disciplines, such as training and development, compensation, organisational design, change management, and performance management, to name but a few. Furthermore, HR professionals should also demonstrate excellent communications skills, and be able to implement knowledge management systems. Finally, HR professionals should understand the business; they should display business- and technological acumen, and be competent to perform corporate analyses.

In conclusion, it clear there is a great divergence of opinions regarding the competencies that HR professionals should demonstrate in the workplace. Much confusion still exists regarding the exact roles and subsequent competence requirements of HR professionals globally (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). In order to fill this gap, the SABPP developed and launched a new competence model in 2012, to clearly express what HR professionals should be able to deliver in the South African context (Meyer, 2012). The competence model provides a foundation for the continuous professional development of South African HR practitioners. Furthermore, this model recognises that HR practitioners function at different levels, have different fields of specialisation, and are at different stages in their careers; yet, this model was intended to provide focus and consistency, and to suggest development areas for HR professionals in South Africa.

The competence model proposed by the SABPP consists of three domains, with specific competencies linked to each (Meyer, 2012). The first domain is labelled *Core competencies*, and consists of *Leadership and personal credibility* (i.e. demonstrating the necessary leadership skills and personal credibility), *Organisational capability* (understanding the organisation's needs and its environment, in order to deliver effective HR practices), *Solution creation and implementation* (creating, planning, innovating, and implementing HR solutions aligned with the business strategy), *Interpersonal and communication skills* (building successful relationships through excellent interpersonal and communication skills), and *Citizenship for the future* (i.e. HR must become a strategic business partner who drives innovation, technology optimisation, and sustainability).

The second component of the SABPP model addresses five key HR capabilities. These are *Strategy* (the ability to create a people-driven business strategy), *Talent management* (implementation of human capital management business plans), *HR governance, risk, and compliance* (effective governance of HR functions and compliance with legislation, rules, and codes), *Analytics and measurement* (developing effective measures to demonstrate HR's impact on business), and *HR service delivery* (delivering quality HR products and services to management, employees, and key stakeholders) (Meyer, 2012).

The final domain of the SABPP competence model forms the foundation of HR professionalism, and includes competencies such as *HR and business knowledge*, *Ethics* (driving business ethics according to professional guidelines), *Professionalism* (professional conduct in service delivery), and *Duty to society* (demonstrating expertise that has an impact on society).

Towards a hypothesised model for the study

In the light of the preceding section, the professional competence model of the SABPP, as well as other competence models, was used as foundation to develop a professional competence measure for the South Africa context. Based on the preceding literature review, three HR competence dimensions were identified: *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. *Professional behaviour and leadership* refer to the suitability of HR professionals' actions whether intentionally or unintentionally towards environmental changes or conditions that reflect on the qualities that are connected to HR leadership and professional responsibilities. *HR service orientation and execution* involves the ability of HR practitioners to analyze situations or problems, make timely and sound decisions, construct plans and achieve optimal results to the changing demands of customers. *HR Business intelligence* refers to the ability by HR professionals to position itself as an essential value-adding department of the organization through the usage of information to gain a competitive edge over competitors. For purposes of this research, three main and 12 sub-hypotheses were formulated. The proposed model is displayed in Figure 3.2, below, followed by the hypotheses.

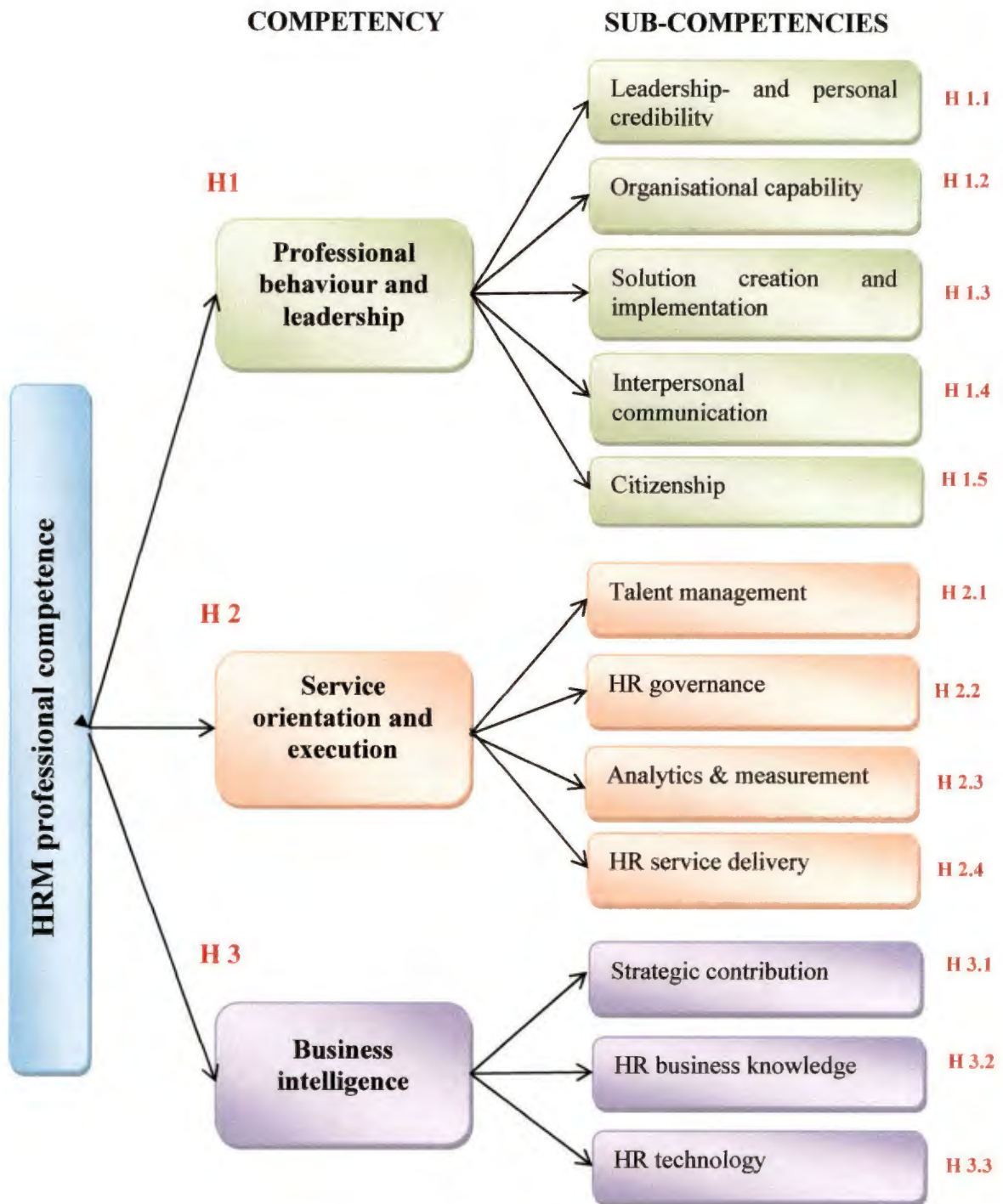


Figure 3.2: Hypothesised model for the study (Author's own).

- H 1. *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 1.1 *Leadership- and personal and credibility* have a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency. .
- H 1.2 *Organisational capability* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.3 *Solution creation and implementation* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.4 *Interpersonal communication* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 1.5 *Citizenship* has a direct and positive relationship with *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency.
- H 2 *Service orientation and execution* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 2.1 *Talent management* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 2.2 *HR governance* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service Orientation and execution* competency.
- H 2.3 *Analytics and measurement* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 2.4 *HR service delivery* has a direct and positive relationship with *Service orientation and execution* competency.
- H 3 *Business intelligence* competency has a direct and positive relationship with *HRM professional competence*.**
- H 3.1 *Strategic contribution* has a direct and positive relationship with *Business intelligence* competency.
- H 3.2 *HR business knowledge* has direct and positive relationship *Business intelligence* competency.

H 3.3 *HR technology* has a direct and positive relationship with *Business intelligence* competency.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative research approach was followed. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data and attain the research goals (Field, 2009). The present research mostly followed the DeVellis scale development process (DeVellis, 1991). The steps of the DeVellis scale development process, as well as the extent to which the researcher applied these in the present study, are indicated in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1: DeVellis Scale Development Process

Description of scale development
<p>Step 1: Application in present study</p> <p>Step 1a: Application of a theoretical basis to develop the items</p> <p>Identification of the parameters of HRM theory to be included in the measurement scale, which informed the conceptual framework for the study</p>
<p>Step 2: Item generation</p> <p>Item generation was based on theoretical relationships between constructs gleaned from an extensive literature review and document analyses. Statements were formulated, rather than questions.</p>
<p>Step 3: Determining the scale and measurement format</p> <p>Developing format of items, using statements in a Likert-response format (DeVellis, (1991). Additionally, checklist-style questions and open-ended questions were included.</p>
<p>Step 4: Conducting an item analysis to eliminate inadequate items</p> <p>An expert panel of 15 subject matter experts reviewed the scale, and were provided with construct definitions and asked to rate items in terms of adequacy, relevance, conciseness, and potentially confusing wording.</p>
<p>Step 5: Selecting validation items that can be administered to developmental sample</p> <p>This research did not include social desirability scales. The scale does use repetition of items that measure the same construct in different sub-scales to determine if similar or different responses were provided.</p>

Step 6: Designing and conduct a developmental study

Administering of HR professional competency diagnostic items and validation items to a sample of 150 to 300 HR practitioners and managers ($N=189$) at different levels within corporate institutions in South Africa.

Step 7: Evaluating the items

As advised by (DeVellis, 1991, p. 82-85) item-scale correlations, item variance, item means, and coefficient alphas were included when appropriate.

Step 7a: Determining construct validity of the measure

This included conducting exploratory factor analysis. At a later stage, confirmatory factor analysis would be conducted, but that would require a larger sample.

Step 7b: Determining the convergent validity of the measure

Convergent validity could not be determined in the current study.

Step 7c: Determining the divergent validity of the measure

This entails determine whether method effects are influencing the scale findings, which may also require a criterion-related study and a larger sample than the present sample.

Step 7d: Assessing the reliability of the scale

This entailed determining internal consistency reliabilities. Test-retest reliabilities could not be considered, as the respondents were anonymous. Some items would be expected to change over time, such as intention to quit or satisfaction. The alternative is to administer the scale to another sample, which would enable multiple measures of reliability to be compared.

Step 8: Optimising scale length

Due to the nature of the scale (a diagnostic tool that can be used regularly) the scale needed to be short enough to avoid respondent fatigue; therefore, considerable attention was given to optimizing scale length.

Source: DeVellis (1991).

This article reports the results relating to Step 1 to Step 6 of the DeVellis (1991) scale development process.

Sampling

For the present study, HR officers and managers of various public and private organisations were chosen as the unit of analysis, as they were in the best position to act as informants on the competencies they desire of HR practitioners. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and provide the desired information. A total of 189 respondents participated in the study, which represented a 100% response rate. This sample size was adequate for

further analyses (see DeVellis, 1991).

The demographics of the respondents were as follows: 50.8% were men, 86.8% spoke indigenous languages, and 92.1% were of the black African ethnic group. Of the respondents, 34.9% aged 40-49, 42.3% held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational qualification, and 39.2% were employed on middle management level. A total of 24.3% of respondents six to ten years' work experience, 90.5% had been employed in their job for 0-10 years, and 61.4% had been employed in their current organisation 0-10 years.

Research Procedure

Permission was obtained from the necessary authorities prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hard-copy surveys were distributed to the relevant participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the administration of the surveys. Confidentiality was maintained at all times.

Measuring Instrument

The questionnaire was developed based on a thorough document analysis and an extensive literature review. Item generation was based on the theoretical relationships between constructs. A total of 15 questionnaires were pretested using subject-matter experts. Revisions were made based on the recommendations of these experts. This ensured the content validity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of the following three sections, based on the competency dimensions in the hypothesised model: Professional behaviour and leadership, Service Orientation and Business Intelligence. The ***Professional behaviour and leadership*** competency dimension includes five sub-competencies, namely *Leadership- and credibility* (13 items), *Organisational capability* (nine items), *Solution creation* (12 items items), *Interpersonal communication* (seven items), and *Citizenship* (six items). The ***Service orientation and execution*** competency dimension addressed four sub-competencies: *Talent management* (15 items), *HR governance* (seven items), *Analytics and measurement* (13 items), and *HR service delivery* (six items). The ***Business intelligence*** competency dimension addressed four sub-competencies: *Strategic contribution* (20 items), *HR business knowledge* (15 items), and *HR technology* (three items). *Strategic contribution* was originally clustered under *Service orientation and execution*, but, based on an expert's,

input, was moved to form part of *Business intelligence*. Responses were measured in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Not important” (1) to “Critical” (5).

Data Analyses

Data were analysed with aid of SPSS (2015). Descriptive statistics (i.e. means, frequencies, skewness, and kurtosis) were applied. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to determine the underlying factor structure of the measurement (Brown, 2006). The reliability of the measurement was determined by means of Cronbach alpha coefficients. A cut-off point of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ was used for the reliability of the measurement. The following goodness-of-fit indices were utilised for confirmatory factor analyses, (see Field, 2009): chi-squared statistic and degrees of freedom; two absolute fit measures, namely the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the standardised root mean residual (SRMR); and two incremental fit measures, namely the non-normed fit index (NNFI) and the comparative fit index (CFI). The guidelines of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) were used as an indication of acceptable model fit for the HRM professional competence model: chi-squared statistic, $2 \leq \chi^2$ to $Df \geq 5$; CFI $\geq .90$; NNFI ≥ 0.90 ; SRMR 0.08 or less (with CFI above 0.92); RMSEA < 0.07 (with a CFI of 0.90 or higher).

RESULTS

The metric properties of the HRM Professional Competence Model were first examined. This was done using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure to determine the sampling adequacy and sphericity of the item-correlation matrix, exploratory factor analysis to discover and identify the dimensions of the measurements, and reliability analysis, using Cronbach alpha coefficients, to give the measure of accuracy of the instruments and determine how repeatable the results were. The questionnaire’s measure of sampling adequacy was 0.958 for *Professional Behaviour and Leadership*, 0.965 for *Service Orientation and Execution*, and 0.958 for *Business intelligence*, which, according to the guideline of higher than 0.6, were adequate for factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The results of the factor analyses are reported next.

Factor Analyses: *Professional Behaviour and Leadership*

Exploratory factor analyses using principal components analyses were done on the 47 items of the *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that five factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the five underlying factors. Nine items were deleted, due to problematic loadings. The five factors explained 77.671% of the variance, and were labelled *Solution creation* (Factor 1), *Interpersonal and communication skills* (Factor 2), *Leadership- and personal credibility* (Factor 3), *Organisational capability* (Factor 4), and *Citizenship* (Factor 5). All items showed acceptable loadings. The rotated component matrix is reported in Table 3.2, below.

Table 3.2: Rotated component matrix for Professional Behaviour and leadership

	Solution creation	Interpersonal communication	Leadership- and personal credibility	Organisational capability	Citizenship
HRCC 1	.460	.336	.570	.232	.264
HRCC 2	.434	.356	.626	.241	.249
HRCC 3	.319	.353	.601	.202	.385
HRCC 4	.377	.326	.624	.257	.322
HRCC 5	.514	.152	.538	.321	.176
HRCC 6	.520	.155	.618	.297	.132
HRCC 7	.166	.309	.704	.280	.196
HRCC 8	.324	.416	.671	.275	.121
HRCC 14	.323	.338	.331	.578	.210
HRCC 15	.310	.238	.182	.756	.078
HRCC 16	.307	.350	.385	.682	.086
HRCC 17	.283	.332	.384	.693	.154
HRCC 18	.332	.222	.191	.704	.249
HRCC 19	.268	.401	.225	.614	.348
HRCC 24	.615	.295	.341	.284	.268
HRCC 25	.538	.272	.355	.322	.272
HRCC 26	.729	.384	.255	.278	.169
HRCC 27	.628	.333	.384	.306	.150
HRCC 28	.616	.425	.309	.259	.255
HRCC 29	.741	.363	.206	.184	.218
HRCC 30	.629	.445	.270	.220	.280
HRCC 31	.612	.335	.218	.370	.301
HRCC 32	.658	.274	.251	.370	.279
HRCC 33	.720	.300	.298	.284	.224

HRCC 34	.667	.301	.283	.304	.200
HRCC 35	.356	.694	.176	.335	.143
HRCC 36	.395	.743	.190	.257	.145
HRCC 37	.280	.739	.323	.250	.070
HRCC 38	.315	.690	.370	.252	.145
HRCC 39	.336	.714	.312	.247	.178
HRCC 40	.350	.682	.394	.330	.111
HRCC 41	.458	.589	.276	.313	.204
HRCC 42	.299	.452	.280	.327	.591
HRCC 43	.155	-.058	.102	.021	.597
HRCC 44	.217	.502	.250	.283	.621
HRCC 45	.332	.495	.225	.324	.529
HRCC 46	.326	.539	.254	.292	.522
HRCC 47	.329	.420	.276	.340	.538

Factor Analyses: *Service Orientation and Execution*

An exploratory factor analysis, using principal components analysis, was done on the 41 items of the *Service orientation and execution* competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors. Four items were deleted, due to problematic loadings. The four factors explained 75.493% of the variance, and were labelled *Talent management* (Factor 1), *HR governance* (Factor 2), *Analytics and measurement* (Factor 3), and *HR service delivery* (Factor 4). All items showed acceptable loadings. The rotated component matrix is reported in Table 3.3, below.

Table 3.3: Rotated component matrix for Service orientation and execution

	Talent management	HR governance	Analytics and measurement	HR service delivery
HREC1	.728	.337	.028	.130
HREC 2	.761	.325	.090	.106
HREC 3	.792	.353	.085	.073
HREC 4	.777	.344	.174	.114
HREC 5	.844	.290	.231	.060
HREC 6	.833	.175	.168	.149
HREC 7	.818	.192	.233	.213
HREC 8	.803	.203	.269	.200
HREC 9	.654	.189	.223	.412

HREC 10	.673	.248	.283	.395
HREC 11	.753	.186	.341	.248
HREC 12	.751	.184	.262	.286
HREC 13	.693	.334	.147	.443
HREC 14	.686	.167	.224	.450
HREC 15	.670	.298	.199	.429
HREC 18	.381	.483	.343	.491
HREC 19	.342	.413	.302	.630
HREC 20	.330	.378	.210	.726
HREC 21	.299	.390	.321	.683
HREC 22	.244	.358	.396	.625
HREC 25	.385	.664	.226	.317
HREC 26	.316	.650	.348	.372
HREC 27	.288	.643	.252	.465
HREC 28	.289	.616	.263	.425
HREC 29	.249	.692	.302	.284
HREC 30	.341	.706	.241	.332
HREC 31	.323	.697	.300	.336
HREC 32	.267	.631	.391	.155
HREC 33	.276	.657	.345	.216
HREC 34	.264	.712	.169	.197
HREC 35	.309	.679	.342	-.005
HREC 36	.269	.383	.694	.184
HREC 37	.201	.417	.744	.249
HREC 38	.284	.401	.646	.420
HREC 39	.282	.385	.740	.273
HREC 40	.359	.479	.516	.269
HREC 41	.258	.452	.646	.258

Factor Analyses: *Business Intelligence*

An exploratory factor analysis, using principal components analysis, was done on the 38 items of the *Business intelligence* competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. However, as three factors made more sense in this case, a subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the three underlying factors relating to *Business intelligence*. The three factors were labelled *Strategic contribution* (Factor 1), *HR business knowledge* (Factor 2), and *HR technology* (Factor 3). The three factors explained 67.934% of the variance of the *Business intelligence* dimension. All items showed acceptable loadings. The rotated component matrix is reported in Table 3.4, below.

Table 3.4: Rotated component matrix for Business intelligence

	Strategic contribution	HR business knowledge	HR technology
HRFC 1	.645	.225	.112
HRFC 2	.524	.239	.358
HRFC 3	.725	.258	.220
HRFC 4	.789	.196	.196
HRFC 5	.753	.333	.171
HRFC 6	.689	.412	.244
HRFC 7	.706	.277	.191
HRFC 8	.723	.290	.124
HRFC 9	.735	.322	.041
HRFC 10	.723	.288	.278
HRFC 11	.731	.326	-.009
HRFC 12	.777	.189	.038
HRFC 13	.718	.348	.177
HRFC 14	.789	.276	.129
HRFC 15	.699	.298	.201
HRFC 16	.702	.285	.211
HRFC 17	.756	.345	.214
HRFC 18	.758	.387	.212
HRFC 19	.719	.417	.045
HRFC 20	.741	.272	.104
HRFC 21	.443	.507	.359
HRFC 22	.329	.671	.320
HRFC 23	.259	.778	.137
HRFC 24	.325	.753	.144
HRFC 25	.305	.746	.231
HRFC 26	.294	.825	.115
HRFC 27	.360	.753	.115
HRFC 28	.319	.783	.161
HRFC 29	.294	.791	.109
HRFC 30	.280	.795	.079
HRFC 31	.262	.757	.153
HRFC 32	.323	.754	.134
HRFC 33	.292	.698	.242
HRFC 34	.335	.731	.221
HRFC 35	.331	.730	.178
HRFC 36	.252	.404	.792
HRFC 37	.255	.369	.814
HRFC 38	.212	.142	.830

The descriptive statistics of the three measures are reported in Table 3.5, below.

Table 3.5: Descriptive Statistics of the HRM Professional Competence Model

	Original number of items	Remaining number of items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
<i>Professional behaviour and leadership</i>							
Leadership- and personal credibility	13	8	4.0139	.82889	-.796	.324	0.952
Organisational capability	9	6	3.9012	.87516	-.722	.154	0.936
Solution creation	12	11	4.1371	.82868	-1.101	.949	0.97
Interpersonal communication	7	7	4.1663	.83572	-.977	.553	0.961
Citizenship	6	6	4.0767	.91279	-.474	1.919	0.805
<i>Service orientation and execution</i>							
Talent management	15	15	3.7901	.91043	-.672	.000	0.973
HR governance	7	5	4.1376	.88276	-.980	.105	0.939
Analytics and measurement	13	11	4.0067	.82132	-.997	.795	0.957
HR service delivery	6	6	4.0035	.86020	-.864	.335	0.945
<i>Business intelligence</i>							
Strategic contribution	20	20	3.9937	.78448	-.746	.238	.970
HR business knowledge	15	15	4.1616	.74862	-.860	.099	.966
HR technology	3	3	4.0459	.92395	-1.050	.747	.901

The results, provided in Table 3.5, showed excellent reliabilities for the all the dimensions of the HRM Professional Competence Model. Furthermore, the results for *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence* were negatively skewed. The mean scores indicated that the respondents viewed all competencies measured by the HRM Professional Competence Model as important, with *Interpersonal communication*, *HR business knowledge*, and *HR governance* rated as the most important.

Subsequent confirmatory factor analyses were performed on Professional *behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence dimensions*. The results are reported in Table 3.6, below.

Table 3.6: Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses – Fit Statistics

	Professional behaviour and leadership		Service orientation and execution		Business intelligence	
S-B χ^2	897.1448		1083.5846		1006.5967	
Df	655		623		662	
S-B χ^2 / Df	1.3696		1.7393		1.5205	
CFI	.948		.913		.931	
NNFI	.945		.907		.927	
RMSEA	.044		.063		.053	
90% confidence interval of RMSEA	.037,	.051	.056,	.069	.046,	.059
SRMR	.037		.047		.050	

The results, provided in Table 3.6, indicate the goodness-of-fit for the factor models of the dimensions *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. The results of the confirmatory factor analyses complied with the guidelines prescribed by Hair *et al.* (2010). Both the CFI and NNFI values of the three dimensions were above the prescribed value of 0.90. The RMSEA values for the three dimensions complied with the prescribed value of less than of 0.70 (see Hair *et al.*, 2010). Thus, both the upper and lower bounds of RMSEA were well within the acceptable range in this case. Finally, the results of the SRMR of the three measures were in line with proposed value of less than 0.08.

The results of the hypotheses are reported in Table 3.7, below.

Table 3.7: Summary of Hypotheses testing

H	HYPOTHESES	RESULT
H 1.	<i>Professional behaviour and leadership competency has a direct and positive relationship with HRM professional competence.</i>	Confirmed
H 1.1	<i>Leadership- and credibility have a direct and positive relationship with Professional behaviour and leadership competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 1.2	<i>Organisational capability has a direct and positive relationship with Professional behaviour and leadership competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 1.3	<i>Solution creation and implementation has a direct and positive relationship with Professional behaviour and leadership competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 1.4	<i>Interpersonal communication has a direct and positive relationship with Professional behaviour and leadership competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 1.5	<i>Citizenship has a direct and positive relationship with Professional behaviour and leadership competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 2	<i>Service orientation and execution competency has a direct and positive relationship with HRM professional competence.</i>	Confirmed
H 2.1	<i>Talent management has a direct and positive relationship with Service orientation and execution competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 2.2	<i>HR governance has a direct and positive relationship with Service Orientation and Execution competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 2.3	<i>Analytics and measurement has a direct and positive relationship with Service orientation and execution competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 2.4	<i>HR service delivery has a direct and positive relationship with Service orientation and execution competency.</i>	Confirmed
H 3	<i>Business intelligence competency has a direct and positive relationship with HRM professional competence.</i>	Confirmed
H 3.1	<i>Strategic contribution has a direct and positive relationship with Business intelligence competency.</i>	Confirmed

H 3.2	<i>HR business knowledge</i> has direct and positive relationship <i>Business intelligence</i> competency.	Confirmed
H 3.3	<i>HR technology</i> has a direct and positive relationship with <i>Business intelligence</i> competency.	Confirmed

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to develop and test a diagnostic tool for the measurement of HRM professional competencies in the South African workplace. The literature reviews showed a global divergence of opinion regarding the competence requirements for HR professionals, which has resulted in role confusion. Moreover, the interchangeable use of jargon relating to HR roles, responsibilities, functions, practices, and competencies amplifies the need to develop a holistic and empirically tested HR professional competence model for the South African context.

The results of the factor analyses revealed three distinguishable dimensions of HRM professional competencies, which were labelled *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. The results confirmed five factors for *Professional behaviour and leadership*, namely *Leadership- and personal credibility*, *Organisational capability*, *Solution creation*, *Interpersonal communication*, and *Citizenship*, which factors are in line with the Leadership competencies of the SABPP's South African HR Competency Model (Meyer, 2012). All factors showed good to excellent reliabilities.

The results of the factors analyses for *Service orientation and execution* contradicted the recommendation of the SABPP competency model that *Strategic impact* should form part of HR capabilities such as *Service orientation*. Four factors were identified for *Service orientation and execution*: *Talent management*, *HR governance*, *Analytics and measurement*, and *HR service delivery*. The factors showed excellent reliabilities.

The factor analysis of *Business intelligence* confirmed three underlying factors, namely *Strategic impact*, *HR business knowledge*, and *HR technology*. All showed excellent reliabilities. In contrast with the model of the SABPP (2012), we suggest that *Strategic impact* form part of *Business intelligence*. The results are also in line with the postulation of other researchers who highlighted the importance of HR business knowledge and technology as competencies (Lee & Yu, 2013).

The present research makes important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the limited empirical knowledge that exists on HRM competencies in the South African workplace. This research also contributes the clustering and refining of key HR competencies, to provide a more holistic and condensed approach to HR professionalism. Methodologically, this research introduces a new and reliable HR competence model that can be used to track HR professionalism and competence in the workplace. Managers and HR professionals can therefore use this measurement as a basis to improve HR competencies and subsequent HR service delivery.

This research has some limitations. First, a cross-sectional research approach was followed, which limited making inferences about cause and effect over the long term. A longitudinal study will assist in tracking the importance of HR competencies over the long term, and make these applicable to current business needs. The considerable lack of empirical studies on HR competencies and the divergent opinions made the interpretation of the results difficult. For future research, it is recommended that the sample size be increased, to allow for further validation of the instrument. The instrument should also be tested in specific industries, to enhance the effective application of HR roles and responsibilities in multiple domains.

In conclusion, this research proved the preliminary utility of an HR competency measure for HR professionals in the South African context. We believe that this measure will make a valuable contribution towards enhancing HR professionalism and improved HR service delivery to the multiple stakeholders.

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Chapter 4:

MANUSCRIPT 3

THE VALIDATION OF A HRM PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE MODEL FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

Orientation. The last two decades have seen a great interest in the development of HRM professional competence models to advance the value-add of HR practitioners in organisations. However, empirical research on competency requirements for HR practitioners in the South African context has not been forthcoming.

Research purpose. The main objective of the present research was to validate a HRM competence measure for the assessment of professional HRM competencies in the workplace.

Motivation for the study. Competency models can assist HR professionals in supporting their organisations to achieve success and sustainability.

Research approach, design, and method. A cross-sectional research approach was followed. The proposed HRM Professional Competence Model was administered to a diverse population of HR managers and practitioners ($N = 483$).

Main findings. Exploratory factor analyses resulted in three distinguishable competency dimensions for HR professionals: *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*). All factors showed acceptable construct equivalence for the English- and indigenous-language groups.

Practical/Managerial implications. Managers can use the newly validated competence measure to detect the extent to which HR professionals are able to perform their roles in organisations.

Contribution/value-add. This research adds to the limited HR professional competence measures that currently exist.

Keywords: competencies, construct equivalence, HR professionals, validation

INTRODUCTION

The development of HR professional competence models has gained a great deal of attention over the past decade as a means for organisations to adapt to unprecedented changes in the business world (Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011). HR practitioners are currently expected to play a dual role by becoming a business partner and protecting employees' interests, on the one hand, while managing and implementing strategies and practices that respond to economic circumstances (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). Competence models can therefore assist HR professionals to support their organisations in achieving success and sustainability (Sikora & Ferris, 2014; Ulrich *et al.*, 2008).

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 (see Coetzee, Mitong-Monga, & Swart, 2014; Magua & Roodt, 2010; Scheepers & Schuping, 2011; Schultz, 2010; Steyn, 2008; Van der Westhuizen, Van Vuuren, & Visser, 2003; Van Vuuren & Eiselen, 2006; Van Wyk, 2006; Walker, 2006). Furthermore, the results of these studies illustrate the confusion regarding the roles and responsibilities of HR practitioners and their lack of competence to fulfil key roles.

Therefore, there is a need to establish and empirically validate a professional HR competence model that can be applied by HR professionals in the South African context. The SABPP introduced a new competence model in 2012, to guide the professional conduct of HR professionals in South Africa. This model, however, still needs to be empirically validated. Schutte (2015) used the SABPP's model to develop a competence measure as a foundation to assess a complete model that HR professionals can use in the further professionalisation of the HR profession in South Africa. The present article discusses the validation of this measure, as well as its equivalence in a culturally diverse South Africa.

This article is structured as follows. First, we present a critical overview of the available measures of HR roles, responsibilities, and competencies in the South African context. This is followed by a discussion of the research method employed in the present study. Thereafter, the empirical results of the research are reported. The research concludes with a discussion of the results, together with recommendations for both practice and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HRM assessments in the South African Context

An extensive review of literature revealed three trends in assessing HR practitioners' roles, responsibilities, and competencies in the South African workplace. Studies to date adopted global or consultancy measures to assess HR practitioners' roles and the application of HR practices in the workplace. Second, authors developed their own measurements to assess the application of global HR frameworks in the South Africa context. Finally, authors develop their own measures to assess specific areas of the HR field, such as competencies, ethics, and professionalism. Only nine quantitative research studies could be found that focused specifically on the assessment of the roles, practices, and competencies of HR practitioners in South African organisations. A critical overview of the assessment of HR roles, responsibilities, and practices, as well as their applicability in the South African context, is provided hereunder.

Steyn (2008) and Walters (2006) used the Human Resource Role Assessment of Ulrich (1997) to explore the strategic role of HR professionals in the South African context. The survey consisted of 40 statements that measure four roles: strategic partner, change agent, employee champion, and administrative expert; using operational phrasing and describes concepts, practices and activities of the HR function. In both studies, the measure yielded important information on the extent to which HR functions are allowed to play a strategic role in South African organisations. Although this measure is globally still the predominant measure of HR roles and competencies in the workplace, future studies should expand the

measure to give an accurate reflection of the HR profession in the South African context.

Scheepers and Schuping (2011) applied the Human Resources Practices Scale of Geringer, Colette, and Milliman (2002) to determine the effect of HR practices on the psychological contract in a mining company. The questionnaire consisted of 50 items, and measured five HRM practices, namely communication, hiring practices, training and development, performance appraisal, and remuneration practices. This questionnaire was extensively validated in more than 40 countries, and showed promising results for use in both developed and developing contexts. Exploratory factors analyses showed several cross-loadings between the items of the five factors (Scheepers & Schuping, 2011). Furthermore, the instrument is limited in its assessment of the full scope of HR practices in the workplace. This survey should thus be further validated in the South African context, and could be expanded to include a broader scope of HR practices.

Coetzee, Mitong-Monga, and Swart (2014) used an organisational culture survey of Deloitte and Touche (2009) to assess the extent to which HR practices predict the commitment of engineering staff. This survey measures 13 organisational HR practices: change, communication, diversity and transformation, HR policies and procedures, innovation, job satisfaction, leadership, management style, performance management, recognition, rewards and remuneration, training and development, and values and culture. Although this survey was sufficient for the purposes of that study, its scope is rather broad; there should be more focus on the specific roles and requirements of HR professionals in the South African context.

Magua and Roodt (2010) developed a survey to assess the application of the Human Capital Bridge™ framework (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007) in the South African context. The 27-item questionnaire measures operational excellence, growing the company, and securing the future, and represented the company's strategic themes. Although this survey yielded promising results, the authors acknowledged that the Human Capital Bridge™ framework was not applied to the fullest extent to guide the measurement solutions to assist both HR and

line managers to measure the contribution of human capital towards strategic objectives.

Schultz (2010) developed a measure to assess the effectiveness of HR competencies at a merged higher education institution. This questionnaire was developed based on the HR balanced scorecard of the institution, and assesses three HR competencies: business knowledge, HR practices, personal skills, and management skills. Although this study was narrow in its scope in terms of assessing the different types of HR competencies, it provided valuable insights into the need for HR competence assessment in the South African context.

Other researchers developed measures to assess specific areas of the HR role in the South African context. Van Wyk (2006) developed a measure to assess the extent to which HR practitioners display knowledge and apply competencies regarding social responsibility issues such as HIV/AIDS in the workplace. The findings revealed a gap in the knowledge of HR practitioners at all organisational levels on managing HIV/AIDS. Van Vuuren and Eiselen (2006) developed a measure to assess the role of HR professionals in corporate ethics. The results showed that HR practitioners generally believe that they indeed have an ethics management competency, and that they should be involved in ethics management. Van der Westhuizen, van Vuuren, and Visser (2003) developed a measure to assess the status of HRM as a profession in the South African context. The results of their study showed that HR practitioners do consider HRM to be a profession, but that it still needs to achieve true professional status. The above studies provided useful information on specific areas within the HR professional's function, and should encourage other researchers to conduct more detailed research on other functional areas of HRM.

To summarize, it is clear from the above discussion that a holistic and accurate measure of HR competencies within the South African context is lacking. Although most of the researchers discussed above developed measures to assess various areas relating the HR function, none focused on validation or further validating their measures. These studies, however, provided much-needed and useful information, which led to the development of the SABPP's South African HR Competency Model (SABPP, 2012). The SABPP identified 14

competencies that HR professionals should be able to display in the South African workplace. These are: 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.

Schutte (2015) used this model as a guideline to develop an HR competence model and measure for HR professionals in the South African context. The model and measure consists of three dimensions, namely *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. This survey, furthermore, measures 12 competencies associated with the three dimensions. The pilot study of this measure yielded promising results, with clear factor structures and high reliabilities for the three dimensions (Schutte, 2015). The present paper focuses on further validation of this model and measure in the South African context.

Not only is it important to establish reliable and valid methods of measurement with regard to HRM competencies, it is also important to consider the cultural diversity in a multicultural setting, such as South Africa. As the HRM Professional Competence Model is a new measure, an assessment of this type should be concerned with construct equivalence. Assurance of measurement equivalency across different cultures is important for determining whether measures of a construct in one culture also exist in other cultures, to determine the degree of variability of the measures across several cultures, and to determine whether the measures are universal or culture-specific (He & van de Vijver, 2012). Furthermore, assessing measurement equivalence across countries and language groups provides information about the factorial invariance of an instrument, and therefore allows the researcher a degree of confidence in using the instrument in two or more cultural settings (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004).

Figure 4.1 below presents a conceptual model for the HR competence measure for HR professionals.

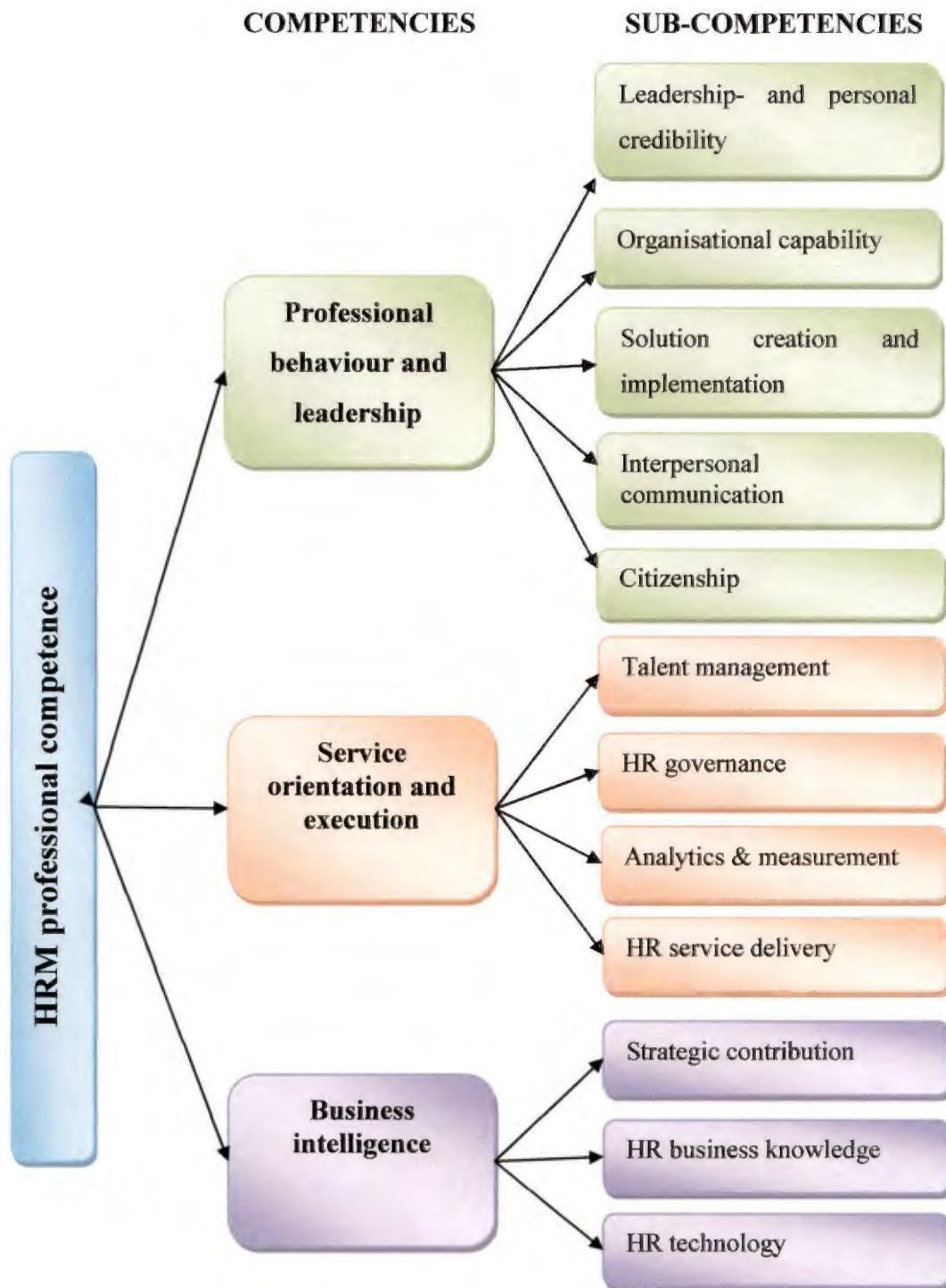


Figure 4.1: Conceptual model for the study (Author's own)

In the light of the preceding section, the following research hypotheses and sub-hypotheses were formulated:

- H 1 The *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency dimension consists of five factors, namely *Leadership- and personal credibility, Organisational capability, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication, and Citizenship*. All factors are reliable, and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.
- H 2: The *Service orientation and execution* competency dimension consists of four factors, namely *Talent management, HR governance, Analytics and measurement, and HR service delivery*. All factors are reliable, and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.
- H 3: The *Business intelligence* competency dimension consists of three factors, namely *Strategic contribution, HR business knowledge, and HR technology*. All factors are reliable, and show construct equivalence for English and indigenous language groups.

HR competencies and background variables

Limited research currently exists on employee perceptions of the importance of HRM competencies and practices in the workplace. Van der Westhuizen *et al.* (2003) found that the formal acknowledgement of HR as a profession is more important to men than to women. In the same study, respondents who were permanently employed in larger organisations viewed education and training as important for HRM as a profession.

A study by Masibigiri and Nienaber (2011) showed that HR practices such as utilisation of skills, career advancement, compensation, job security, and organisational leadership are important factors that will retain generation Y in the workplace. Likewise, Barkhuizen (2014) found that HR practices such as an attractive salary, training and development, and opportunities for career advancement are important to attract Generation Y to organisations.

Job level also appears to have an important influence on how employees view HR and talent management practices. Barkhuizen and Veldsman (2012) found that middle managers perceived a poorer application of talent management practices in the organisations, compared to senior and lower-level management, and were more likely to leave the organisations as a result.

The above overview led to the following hypothesis:

H 4: *Significant differences exist between perceived HR competencies of respondents, based on their demographic characteristics.*

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

The research approach of the present study was quantitative in nature, as the aim of the research was to validate a HR competence measure. A non-experimental cross-sectional survey research strategy of inquiry was utilized in this study, based on the need for exploratory research on HR competencies in the South Africa workplace (see Field, 2009).

Research Method

A quantitative research approach was followed. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data and attain the research goals (Field, 2009). The present research mostly followed the DeVellis scale development process, as the aim was to develop and validate a diagnostic tool for HR professionals' competencies in the South African context. The steps of the DeVellis scale development process, as well as the extent to which these were applied in the present study, are indicated in Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1: DeVellis Scale Development Process

Description of scale development
Step 1: Application in present study Step 1a: Application of a theoretical basis to develop the items Identification of the parameters of HRM theory to be included in the measurement scale, which informed the conceptual framework for the study
Step 2: Item generation Item generation was based on theoretical relationships between constructs gleaned from an extensive literature review and document analyses. Statements were formulated, rather than questions.
Step 3: Determining the scale and measurement format Developing format of items, using statements in a Likert-response format (DeVellis, (1991). Additionally, checklist-style questions and open-ended questions were included.
Step 4: Conducting an item analysis to eliminate inadequate items An expert panel of 15 subject matter experts reviewed the scale, and were provided with construct definitions and asked to rate items in terms of adequacy, relevance, conciseness, and potentially confusing wording.
Step 5: Selecting validation items that can be administered to developmental sample This research did not include social desirability scales. The scale does use repetition of items that measure the same construct in different sub-scales to determine if similar or different responses were provided.
Step 6: Designing and conduct a developmental study Administering of HR professional competency diagnostic items and validation items to a sample of 150 to 300 HR practitioners and managers ($N=189$) at different levels within corporate institutions in South Africa.
Step 7: Evaluating the items As advised by (DeVellis, 1991, p. 82-85) item-scale correlations, item variance, item means, and coefficient alphas were included when appropriate.
Step 7a: Determining construct validity of the measure This included conducting exploratory factor analysis. At a later stage, confirmatory factor analysis would be conducted, but that would require a larger sample.
Step 7b: Determining the convergent validity of the measure Convergent validity could not be determined in the current study.
Step 7c: Determining the divergent validity of the measure This entails determine whether method effects are influencing the scale findings, which may also require a criterion-related study and a larger sample than the present sample.

Step 7d: Assessing the reliability of the scale

This entailed determining internal consistency reliabilities. Test-retest reliabilities could not be considered, as the respondents were anonymous. Some items would be expected to change over time, such as intention to quit or satisfaction. The alternative is to administer the scale to another sample, which would enable multiple measures of reliability to be compared.

Step 8: Optimising scale length

Due to the nature of the scale (a diagnostic tool that can be used regularly) the scale needed to be short enough to avoid respondent fatigue; therefore, considerable attention was given to optimizing scale length.

Source: DeVellis (1991)

This article reports the results relating to Steps 7 and 8 of the DeVellis (1991) scale development process.

Sampling

The respondents were HR officers and managers from various organisations in the public and private sector who had knowledge about HRM processes in the workplace. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby the respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and to provide the desired information. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, of which 483 were returned. This represented a 60.38% response rate. The demographics of the respondents in this sample were as follows: 55.3% were women, 70.6% spoke indigenous languages, and 78.3% were black Africans. Of the respondents, 29.6% were aged 30-39 years, 35.8% held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational qualification, and 31.1% were employed on middle management level. A total of 38.4% of the respondents had six to 15 years' work experience, 83.9% had tenure of 0-10 years in their current job, and 64.2% had a tenure of 0-10 years with their current organisation.

Research Procedure

Permission was obtained from the necessary authorities prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hard-copy and soft-copy surveys were distributed to the relevant participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the administration of the surveys. Confidentiality was

maintained at all times.

Measuring Instrument

The HRM Professional Competence Model (Schutte, 2015) was used as a measure of HR professional competencies in the present study. This questionnaire consisted of three sections that measures three competency dimensions: Professional behaviour and leadership, Service Orientation and excellence and Business Intelligence. The *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency dimension measured five sub-competencies, namely *Leadership- and credibility* (13 items), *Organisational capability* (nine items), *Solution creation* (12 items), *Interpersonal communication* (seven items), and *Citizenship* (six items). The *Service orientation and execution* competency dimension measured four sub-competencies: *Talent management* (15 items), *HR governance* (seven items), *Analytics and measurement* (13 items), and *HR service delivery* (six items). The *Business intelligence* competency dimension measured three sub-competencies: *Strategic contribution* (20 items), *HR business knowledge* (15 items), and *HR technology* (three items).

Responses were measured in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “Not important” (1) to “Critical” (5). The competency dimension measurements obtained acceptable reliabilities in a pilot study by Schutte (2015).

Statistical analyses

Data were analysed with aid of SPSS (2015). Descriptive statistics (i.e. means, frequencies, skewness, and kurtosis) were applied. Construct equivalence was determined. The motivation for the application of these techniques was to obtain a structure in each language group that could then be compared across all language groups involved. Factor analysis is the most frequently employed technique for studying construct equivalence (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). In the current study, both exploratory and confirmatory models could have been used. Since this is a newly developed instrument, the researcher used exploratory factor analysis.

Factors obtained in each group were compared (after target rotation). The agreement was evaluated by a factor congruence coefficient, Tucker's phi (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Values above 0.90 were taken to indicate essential agreement between cultural groups, while values above 0.95 indicated very good agreement. A high agreement implies that the factor loadings of the lower and higher levels are equal, up to a multiplying constant.

MANOVA was used to determine the significance of differences between the dimensions of the HRM Professional Competence Model for the demographic groups. MANOVA tests whether mean differences among groups on a combination of dependent variables are likely to have occurred by chance (Field, 2009). When an effect was significant in MANOVA, one-way ANOVA was used to discover which dependent variables had been affected. T-tests were done to assess the differences between the groups in the sample. For purposes of the present research, we used Cohen's (1988, p. 283) guidelines for the interpretation of effect sizes: 0.0099 constitutes a small effect, 0.0588 a medium effect, and 0.1379 is a large effect.

RESULTS

Because of the composition of the sample, it was decided to conduct the analysis in this study only on English and indigenous language groups. The KMO analyses showed the following measures of sampling adequacy for the English and indigenous language groups: Professional behaviour and leadership measure — English, 0.945 and Indigenous, 0.969; Service orientation and execution measure — English, 0.949 and Indigenous, 0.969; and HR business intelligence measure — English, 0.932 and Indigenous, 0.968. These results were acceptable according to the guideline of a KMO higher than 0.6 being adequate for factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The results of the factor analyses are reported next.

Factor Analyses — *Professional behaviour and leadership dimension*

Exploratory factor analyses, using principal component analyses, were done on the 36 items of the *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues for both language groups. Based on the results of the pilot study, a subsequent principal

component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors. The *Organisational capabilities* factor was deleted, because of problematic loadings (six items). Three more items were deleted to further refine the questionnaire. A subsequent factor analysis using varimax rotation revealed four underlying factors, which explained 82.974% of the variance for the English language group and 81.037% of the variance for the indigenous languages group. The factors for the English language group were as follows: *Innovation* (Factor 1), *Leadership- and personal credibility* (Factor 2), *Interpersonal communication* (Factor 3), and *Solution creation* (Factor 4). The factors for the indigenous language group were as follows: *Leadership- and personal credibility* (Factor 1), *Interpersonal communication* (Factor 2), *Innovation* (Factor 3), and *Solution creation* (Factor 4). The results revealed equivalence for both language groups in terms of the specified factors and items per factor. The original *Citizenship* factor was relabelled *Innovation*. The four factors per language groups are reported in Table 4.2, below.

Table 4.2: Rotated component matrix for the Professional behaviour and leadership Dimension

	English				Indigenous			
	Innovation	Leadership & personal credibility	Interpersonal communication	Solution creation	Leadership- & personal credibility	Interpersonal communication	Innovation	Solution creation
HRCC 1	.352	.631	.491	.229	.692	.283	.398	.286
HRCC 2	.419	.653	.407	.234	.691	.329	.362	.345
HRCC 3	.333	.756	.156	.258	.721	.270	.383	.235
HRCC 4	.304	.753	.323	.203	.750	.310	.340	.259
HRCC 5	.142	.749	.152	.407	.657	.244	.270	.416
HRCC 6	.233	.676	.430	.270	.741	.333	.199	.371
HRCC 7	.320	.652	.415	.244	.779	.308	.224	.153
HRCC 8	.387	.718	.271	.264	.747	.401	.249	.197
HRCC 29	.467	.325	.358	.602	.344	.364	.322	.640
HRCC 30	.121	.275	.206	.616	.345	.372	.366	.583
HRCC 33	.372	.348	.298	.713	.388	.354	.283	.716
HRCC 34	.357	.283	.245	.769	.309	.324	.321	.722
HRCC 35	.289	.500	.546	.435	.330	.707	.356	.178
HRCC 36	.332	.455	.603	.376	.354	.749	.254	.320
HRCC 37	.396	.339	.572	.445	.376	.746	.303	.212
HRCC 38	.472	.312	.741	.241	.308	.732	.312	.288

HRCC 39	.471	.346	.722	.267	.302	.723	.348	.326
HRCC 40	.393	.352	.730	.305	.329	.678	.346	.377
HRCC 41	.408	.384	.674	.325	.373	.604	.380	.346
HRCC 42	.789	.318	.188	.342	.290	.351	.734	.298
HRCC 43	.804	.271	.295	.295	.304	.357	.729	.284
HRCC 44	.822	.254	.308	.272	.353	.370	.758	.151
HRCC 45	.776	.241	.375	.236	.367	.316	.662	.358
HRCC 46	.784	.341	.357	.173	.376	.438	.627	.304
HRCC 47	.778	.375	.322	.164	.376	.288	.625	.407

The rotated component matrices of the four-factor solutions for English and indigenous language participants were then used as input for an exploratory factor analysis with target rotations. The following Tucker's phi coefficients were obtained: *Leadership- and personal credibility* = 0.91; *Innovation* = 0.93; *Interpersonal communication* = 0.94; and *Solution creation* = 0.95. These coefficients compared favourably with the guideline of 0.90, and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results partially confirm Hypotheses 1. The factor analyses revealed four underlying factors for the *Professional behaviour and leadership* competency dimension, which finding is in contrast with the five factors initially specified for the measure. All factors showed acceptable reliabilities and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous language groups.

Factor Analyses: *Service orientation and execution dimension*

An exploratory factor analysis, using principal components analysis, was done on the 37 items of the *Service orientation and execution* competency dimension of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on their eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors for the two language groups. Four items were deleted, due to problematic loadings. The four factors explained 81.660% of the variance for the English language group and 79.693% of the variance for the indigenous languages group. Eleven items were deleted to further refine the questionnaire. The four factors for the

language groups were *Talent management* (Factor 1), *HR service delivery* (Factor 2), *HR metrics* (Factor 3), and *HR Risk* (Factor 4). The original HR *analytics and measurement* factor was relabelled to *HR metrics*. Furthermore the original *HR governance* factor was relabelled to *HR Risk*. The rotated component matrix is reported in Table 4.3, below.

Table 4.3: Rotated component matrix for the Service orientation and execution Dimension

	English				Indigenous			
	Talent	Service	Metrics	Risk	Talent	Service	Metrics	Risk
HREC 1	.785	.221	.374	.027	.793	.303	.115	.120
HREC 2	.759	.288	.332	.160	.802	.268	.137	.177
HREC 6	.800	.335	.199	.219	.801	.217	.306	.156
HREC 9	.786	.325	.237	.281	.751	.252	.300	.261
HREC 10	.767	.347	.126	.374	.739	.301	.309	.254
HREC 11	.746	.377	.158	.340	.742	.268	.328	.244
HREC 13	.765	.242	.215	.346	.715	.221	.288	.392
HREC 14	.695	.328	.161	.497	.705	.199	.252	.436
HREC 15	.753	.302	.233	.387	.629	.223	.393	.408
HREC 18	.382	.264	.389	.588	.425	.318	.408	.569
HREC 19	.431	.246	.455	.613	.373	.314	.349	.691
HREC 20	.411	.304	.254	.696	.352	.354	.296	.678
HREC 21	.349	.384	.269	.720	.318	.419	.272	.718
HREC 22	.247	.129	.457	.718	.246	.425	.344	.674
HREC 26	.234	.235	.768	.326	.359	.324	.700	.295
HREC 27	.143	.286	.713	.412	.321	.359	.642	.405
HREC 28	.250	.373	.700	.366	.368	.340	.673	.351
HREC 29	.328	.469	.561	.161	.285	.449	.640	.260
HREC 30	.478	.328	.619	.145	.368	.393	.655	.271
HREC 31	.451	.479	.566	.255	.348	.436	.612	.312
HREC 36	.318	.831	.228	.092	.337	.718	.344	.140
HREC 37	.324	.784	.275	.183	.285	.760	.312	.273
HREC 38	.332	.804	.221	.244	.293	.740	.248	.380
HREC 39	.291	.786	.210	.336	.312	.773	.226	.302
HREC 40	.271	.780	.274	.266	.354	.658	.362	.324
HREC 41	.337	.741	.333	.200	.246	.662	.357	.336

The rotated component matrices of the four-factor solutions for the English and indigenous language groups were then used as input for an exploratory factor analysis with target rotations. The following Tucker's phi coefficients were obtained: *Talent management* = 0.97; *HR service delivery* = 0.94; HR metrics = 0.91; and *HR risk* = 0.96. These coefficients compared favourably with the guideline of 0.90, and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results confirm Hypotheses 2, namely that the *Service orientation and execution* competency dimension consists of four factors, namely *Talent management*, *HR risk*, *HR metrics*, and *HR service delivery*. All factors showed acceptable reliabilities and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous languages groups.

Factor Analyses: *Business Intelligence* dimension

The factor analyses of the *Business intelligence* competency dimension were done on the original 38 items, as specified in the discussion of the pilot study and the *Organisational capability* factor, which originally formed part of the *Professional behaviour and leadership dimension*. An exploratory factors analysis using principal components analyses was done on the 44 items of the *Business intelligence* competency dimensions of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors relating to the *Business intelligence* questionnaire. The four factors explained 78.535% of the variance for the English language group and 76.181% of the variance for the indigenous languages group. Fourteen items were deleted to refine the questionnaire further. The four factors for both language groups were labelled *Strategic impact* (Factor 1), *HR business knowledge* (Factor 2), *HR business acumen* (Factor 3), and *HR technology* (Factor 4). The results of the rotated component matrix are reported in Table 4.4, below.

Table 4.4: Rotated component matrix for the Business Intelligence dimension

	English				Indigenous			
	Strategic impact	HR business knowledge	HR business acumen	HR technology	Strategic impact	HR business knowledge	HR business acumen	HR technology
HRFC 2	.717	.234	.066	.195	.719	.199	.085	.260
HRFC 3	.789	.201	.119	.231	.733	.196	.225	.260
HRFC 4	.812	.176	.169	.185	.794	.176	.216	.182
HRFC 5	.775	.335	.257	.160	.808	.264	.192	.134
HRFC 6	.763	.313	.261	.148	.736	.323	.249	.205
HRFC 9	.785	.287	.256	.155	.803	.239	.171	.115
HRFC 10	.832	.307	.225	.068	.782	.225	.223	.138
HRFC 17	.665	.368	.385	.144	.742	.334	.257	.072
HRFC 18	.683	.422	.359	.104	.769	.323	.253	.073
HRFC 19	.586	.493	.427	.004	.759	.365	.255	-.073
HRFC 20	.624	.373	.440	.057	.724	.292	.299	-.039
HRFC 21	.438	.626	.152	.220	.387	.632	.257	.135
HRFC 24	.409	.690	.252	.230	.317	.769	.221	.068
HRFC 25	.447	.677	.317	.231	.294	.802	.169	.160
HRFC 26	.367	.702	.362	.306	.323	.836	.167	.103
HRFC 27	.409	.729	.321	.184	.288	.770	.291	.123
HRFC 28	.334	.735	.294	.296	.253	.810	.179	.190
HRFC 29	.335	.721	.245	.279	.228	.789	.236	.143
HRFC 31	.150	.776	.260	.083	.197	.795	.218	.156
HRFC 33	.294	.750	.350	.038	.227	.761	.258	.163
HRFC 34	.293	.804	.109	.290	.237	.783	.233	.056
HRFC 35	.343	.310	.631	.354	.307	.294	.675	.288
HRFC 36	.304	.358	.729	.313	.275	.214	.795	.125
HRFC 37	.311	.303	.708	.374	.277	.315	.803	.187
HRFC 38	.334	.343	.749	.291	.274	.273	.832	.144
HRFC 39	.193	.285	.794	.182	.255	.269	.762	.219
HRFC 40	.248	.250	.697	.427	.280	.316	.765	.218
HRFC 41	.200	.303	.351	.777	.285	.354	.426	.685
HRFC 42	.225	.350	.314	.776	.264	.347	.430	.701
HRFC 43	.196	.174	.407	.769	.236	.198	.419	.719

The rotated component matrices of the four-factor solutions for the English and indigenous language groups were then used as input for an exploratory factor analysis with target rotations. The following Tucker's phi coefficients were obtained: *Strategic impact* = 0.93; *HR business knowledge* = 0.95; *HR business acumen* = 0.92; and *HR technology* = 0.96. These coefficients compared favourably with the guideline of 0.90, and can therefore be regarded as acceptable for equivalence for both language groups.

The above results partially confirm Hypotheses 3. The factor analyses revealed four underlying factors for the *Business intelligence* competency dimension, in contrast to the three factors initially specified. All factors showed acceptable reliabilities and construct equivalence for both the English and the indigenous language groups.

The descriptive statistics of the competency dimensions are reported in Table 4.5, below. The results showed excellent reliabilities for the factors of all the dimensions (see Field, 2009). The results further showed that the dimensions were negatively skewed. The mean scores indicated that the respondents viewed all the dimensions of the HR Professional Competence Model as important, with the factors *Interpersonal communication, Leadership and personal credibility*, and *HR business knowledge* indicated as the most important.

Table 4.5: Descriptive statistics of the competency dimensions and sub-competencies

	English					Indigenous				
	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
<i>Professional behaviour and leadership</i>										
Leadership- and personal credibility	4.0257	.78127	-1.171	1.746	.955	3.9751	.88389	-.961	.742	.962
Solution creation	3.9858	.82742	-1.013	1.260	.881	4.1144	.88103	-1.043	.882	.919
Interpersonal communication	4.0304	.82416	-1.102	1.635	.972	4.1445	.84259	-1.087	1.104	.960
Innovation	3.9586	.85499	-1.185	1.870	.972	4.0156	.86456	-.985	.700	.954
<i>Service orientation and execution</i>										
Talent management	3.9180	.90410	-1.247	1.233	.971	3.8051	.95622	-.759	-.115	.961
HR risk	3.9660	.78630	-.747	.125	.935	4.0657	.91954	-.958	.214	.945
HR metrics	3.8274	.77726	-.610	-.172	.930	3.9594	.88703	-.924	.424	.949
HR service delivery	3.9184	.81883	-.951	.893	.961	3.9658	.87174	-.846	.308	.948
<i>Business intelligence measure</i>										
Strategic impact	3.9181	.83208	-1.026	.972	.962	3.9381	.86487	-.865	.606	.960
HR business knowledge	4.0582	.77967	-1.202	1.775	.965	4.1314	.82197	-1.268	1.881	.962
HR business acumen	3.9716	.91156	-1.257	1.959	.954	3.9951	.96048	-1.049	.661	.948
HR technology	3.8723	.84460	-1.101	1.390	.928	3.9003	.90703	-.862	.587	.917

MANOVA Analyses

Next, the results of the MANOVA of the differences between the importance of the dimensions of the HRM Professional Competence Model and demographic groups are reported.

MANOVA Analyses: *Professional behaviour and leadership*

The results in Table 4.6 show that the respondents differed significantly on the importance of *Professionalism and leadership*, based on the variables *home language, ethnicity, age, qualifications, and years of work experience*. No significant differences were found according to the variables *gender, job level, years in current job, and years in current organisation*. Further *post hoc* analyses showed no significant differences according to home language and ethnicity. The remainder of the *post hoc* analyses results is reported below.

Table 4.6: Manova Analyses – Professional behaviour and leadership and Demographic Groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p	Partial eta squared
Gender	.997	.347 ^b	4.000	475.000	.846	.003
Home language	.030	3.639 ^b	4.000	477.000	.006*	.030
Ethnicity	.932	2.787	12.000	1246.440	.001*	.023
Age	.936	2.247	12.000	1063.884	.008*	.022
Qualification	.934	2.645	12.000	1222.629	.002*	.022
Job level	.957	1.282	16.000	1399.851	.200	.011
Years' work experience	.925	1.541	24.000	1640.844	.046*	.019
Years in current job	.975	1.543 ^b	8.000	952.000	.138	.013
Years in current organisation	.987	.756 ^b	8.000	948.000	.642	.006

* Significant differences

Wilks's lambda for the variable *age* was .936 [$F_{(12, 483)} = 2.247; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the age groups differed in terms of *Leadership- and personal credibility* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 2.773; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .020$], and *Solution generation* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 5.838; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .041$]. Respondents aged 20-29 years viewed the leadership- and personal credibility competency as less important than those aged 30-39 years. Respondents aged 20-29 viewed the competency of solution generation as less important than respondents aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years. The effects were small.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *qualification* was .934 [$F_{(12, 483)} = 2.645; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed in terms of *Leadership- and personal credibility* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 5.245; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .033$], *Solution generation* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 5.653; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .035$], *Interpersonal communication* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 3.988; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .025$], and *Innovation* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 4.322; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .027$]. The results showed that respondents with a postgraduate qualification viewed the leadership- and personal credibility competency as more important than did respondents with a diploma or bachelor's degree as their highest level of qualification. Respondents with a bachelor's degree viewed the competencies of solution creation, interpersonal communication, and innovation as more important than did those with a diploma as their highest level of qualifications. The effects were small.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *years of work experience* was .925 [$F_{(12, 483)} = 1.541; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that groups differed regarding *Solution creation* [$F_{(6, 483)} = 2.329; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .029$]. Those who had 11 to 15 years of work experience regarded the solution creation competency as more importance that did those with 0 to five years of work experience.

MANOVA Analyses: *Service Orientation and Execution*

The results in Table 4.7 show that the respondents differed significantly regarding the importance of *Service orientation and execution*, based on the variables *home language, age, qualifications, and job level*. No significant differences were found with reference to the variables *gender, ethnicity, years of work experience, years in current job, or years in current organisation*. Further *post hoc* analyses showed no significant differences according to the variables *home language and ethnicity*. The remainder of the results of the *post hoc* analyses is reported below.

Table 4.7: Manova Analyses – Service Orientation and execution and Demographic Groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p	Partial eta squared
Gender	.973	3.244 ^b	4.000	475.000	.012	.027
Home language	.963	4.554 ^b	4.000	477.000	.001*	.037
Ethnicity	.958	1.682	12.000	1246.440	.065	.014
Age	.947	1.828	12.000	1063.884	.040*	.018
Qualification	.921	3.220	12.000	1222.629	.000*	.027
Job level	.938	1.857	16.000	1399.851	.020*	.016
Years' work experience	.939	1.245	24.000	1640.844	.191	.016
Years in current organisation	.989	.664 ^b	8.000	952.000	.723	.006
Years in current job	.987	.773 ^b	8.000	948.000	.626	.006

* Significant differences

Wilks's lambda for the variable *age* was .947 [$F_{(12, 483)} = 1.828; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *HR risk* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 4.213; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .030$], *HR metrics* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 4.163; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .030$], and *HR service delivery* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 3.708; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .027$]. Respondents aged 20-29 years viewed *HR risk* as less important than did those aged 30-39 years. Respondents aged 20-29 years viewed *HR metrics* and *HR service delivery* as less important than did respondents aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *qualification* was .921 [$F_{(12, 483)} = 3.220; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *Talent management* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 7.129; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .053$], *HR risk* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 3.452; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .029$], *HR metrics* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 4.513; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .040$], and *HR service delivery* [$F_{(3, 483)} = 4.473; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .040$]. The results showed that respondents with a postgraduate qualification or a bachelor's degree viewed the talent management competency as more important than did those with a certificate or diploma as their highest qualification. Respondents with a bachelor's degree viewed the competencies of governance and HR service delivery as more important than did those with a certificate or diploma as their highest level of qualification. Respondents with a postgraduate qualification viewed the HR service delivery competency as more important than did respondents in possession of a bachelor's degree as their highest level of qualification.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *job level* was .938 [$F_{(16, 483)} = 1.857; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *HR metrics* [$F_{(4, 483)} = 2.715; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .023$]. Respondents employed on middle management level viewed the competency of being able to perform metrics and measurements as more important than did those employed on operational level.

MANOVA Analyses: *Business Intelligence* Dimension

The results in Table 4.8 show that the respondents differed significantly regarding the importance of *Business intelligence*, based on age and qualifications. No significant differences were found for the variables *gender, home language, ethnicity, job level, years of work experience, years in current job, or years in current organisation*. The results of the *post hoc* analyses are reported below.

Table 4.8: Manova Analyses – Business intelligence and demographic groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p	Partial eta squared
Gender	.992	.923 ^b	4.000	473.000	.450	.008
Home language	.997	.310 ^b	4.000	475.000	.872	.003
Ethnicity	.983	.664	12.000	1241.149	.787	.006
Age	.933	2.336	12.000	1058.592	.006*	.023
Qualification	.938	2.481	12.000	1217.337	.003*	.021
Job level	.949	1.493	16.000	1393.741	.094	.013
Years' work experience	.945	1.106	24.000	1633.867	.328	.014
Years in current organisation	.969	1.893 ^b	8.000	948.000	.058	.016
Years in current job	.983	.989 ^b	8.000	944.000	.443	.008

* Significant differences

Wilks's lambda for the variable *age* was .933 [$F_{(12,483)} = 2.336$; $p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differ regarding *HR technology* [$F_{(3,483)} = 4.322$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .031$]. Respondents aged 20-29 years viewed *HR technology* as less important, compared to those aged 30-39 years. Respondents aged 20-29 viewed *HR technology* as less important, compared to respondents aged 30 to 39 years.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *qualification* was .921 [$F_{(12,483)} = 3.220$; $p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differ regarding *Strategic impact* [$F_{(3,483)} = 4.243$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .037$], *HR business knowledge* [$F_{(3,483)} = 3.220$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .032$], *HR business acumen* [$F_{(3,483)} = 3.185$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .026$], and *HR technology* [$F_{(3,483)} = 3.695$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .027$]. The results showed that respondents with a postgraduate qualification viewed *Strategic impact*, *HR business knowledge*, *Business acumen*, and *HR technology* as more important, compared to respondents in possession of a diploma as their highest level of educational qualification.

The above results partially confirm Hypothesis 4 that significant differences exist in the respondents' perceptions of the importance of HR competencies based on their demographic characteristics.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research was to validate the HRM Professional Competence Model for HR practitioners in the South African context. The results showed three distinguishable core competency dimensions, namely *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the *Professional behaviour and leadership* dimension: (1) *Leadership- and personal credibility*, (2) *Solution creation*, (3) *Interpersonal communication*, and (4) *Innovation*. These results contradict the original hypothesised model of Schutte (2015) and the competency model of the SABPP, which hold that organisational capabilities should form part leadership- and professional competencies. The results also confirm the findings of the study by Schultz (2010), who found that management skills represent an important competency for HR professionals.

Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the *Service orientation and execution* dimension. For both participant language groups, the factors were labelled (1) *Talent management*, (2) *HR risk* (3) *HR metrics*, and (4) *HR Service delivery*. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. These results confirm the original hypothesised model of Schutte (2015) in terms of a four-factor solution for the *Service orientation and execution* dimension. These results also partially confirm the *HR capabilities* section of the SABPP model, except that *Strategic impact* should not form part of the *Service orientation and execution* dimension.

Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted in four factors for the *Business intelligence* dimension. For both participant language groups, the four factors were labelled (1) *Strategic impact*, (2) *HR business knowledge*, (3) *Business acumen* and (4) *HR*

technology. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. All factors showed excellent reliabilities. These results partially confirm the original three-factor model of Schutte (2015), but added the factor *Business acumen*, resulting in a four-factor solution for the *Business intelligence* dimension. The results are also in line with the findings of Van Wyk (2006) and Schultz (2010), who found that business knowledge is an important HR professional competency in the South African context.

Based on the above results, the following framework is proposed for the assessment of competencies of HR professionals.

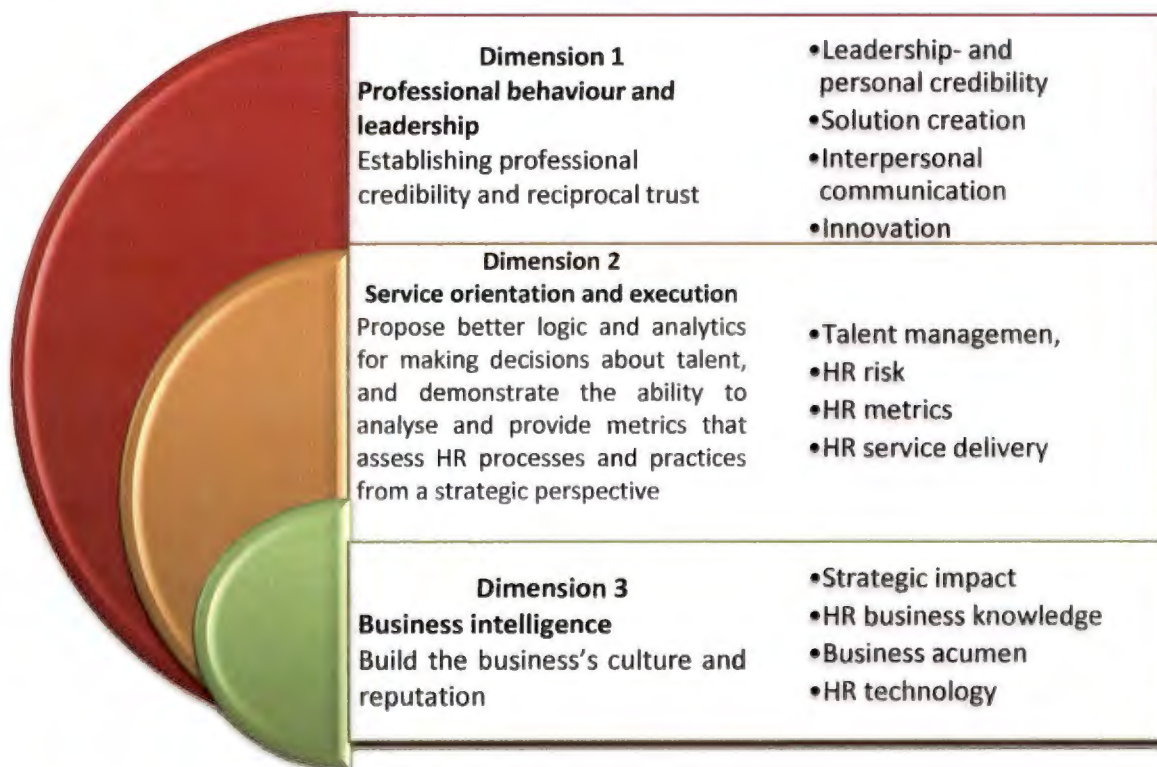


Figure 4.2: Validated HR Professional Competence Model

The MANOVA analyses showed significant differences between the respondents' perceptions of HR competencies based on their demographic characteristics. The predominant was that Generation Y employees view HR competencies as less important, compared to older generations. In the present study, respondents aged 20-29 years viewed *Solution generation, HR metrics, HR service delivery, and HR technology* as less important, compared to respondents aged 30-39 years and 40-49 years. These results contradict previous findings that younger generations view HR competencies as more important than other age groups (Barkhuizen, 2014; Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2011). These results are concerning, as younger generations display faster employment turnover than older generations.

The results further showed that employees with a higher-level qualification viewed the competencies *Leadership- and personal credibility, Solution creation, Interpersonal communication, Innovation, HR risk, HR service delivery, Strategic impact, HR business knowledge, Business acumen, and HR technology* as more important, compared to employees with a lower-level qualification. Furthermore, respondents on middle management level viewed *HR metrics* as more important than did those employed on operational level. Finally, those who had 11 to 15 years of work experience regarded *Solution creation* as more important than did those with 0 to five years' work experience. The results confirm previous findings that employees in higher ranks in organisations and with more years of work experience regard HR practices as more important, compared to those on lower organisational levels (Barkhuizen & Veldsman, 2012).

This research makes important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this research makes an important contribution towards knowledge on the importance of HR competencies in the South African workplace. This research further confirmed the validity of the HRM Professional Competency Model, which can be applied in the multi-cultural South African setting. Finally, this research presented an HRM competence measure that can be used to detect competence levels of HRM practitioners in South African organisations, in order to take corrective measures where necessary.

This research has some limitations. First, limited empirical research exists on the application of HRM competencies in South African workplaces, which made interpretation of the results difficult. Second this research was conducted in the South African context only, and the results cannot be generalised to other countries. For future research, it is recommended that this research be expanded to other African and international countries for further validation. This sample only tested construct equivalence between English and indigenous language groups. For future research, it is recommended that the sample be expanded to include Afrikaans-speaking individuals, to test for further equivalence. Future research can benefit from testing the interactive relationship between HR practices and key individual and organisational variables.

In conclusion, this research proved the validity of a new HR competence measure that can be used to detect the level of competencies of HR professionals in the workplace. Moreover, the results of this research also showed that HR competencies should be made more visible to younger generations in the workplace, to counteract their turnover intentions. HR practitioners and managers are therefore encouraged to assess the current levels of HR competence and professionalism, to enhance their value-add and strategic contribution to South African organisations.

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Chapter 5:

MANUSCRIPT 4

EXPLORING THE CURRENT APPLICATION OF HR COMPETENCIES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

Orientation. HR practitioners have an important role to play in the sustainability and competitiveness of organisations. Yet, their strategic contribution and value-add remain unrecognized.

Research purpose. The main objective of the research for this manuscript was to explore the extent to which HR practitioners are allowed to display HR competencies in the workplace, and whether any significant differences exist between perceived HR competencies, based on the respondent's demographic characteristics.

Motivation for the study. Limited empirical research exists on the extent to which HR practitioners are allowed to display key competencies in the South African workplace.

Research approach, design, and method. A quantitative research approach was followed. The Competence Questionnaire was administered to HR practitioners and managers ($N = 481$).

Main findings. The results showed that HR competencies are poorly applied in public-sector workplaces. The competencies that were indicated as having the poorest application were *Talent management, HR metrics, HR business knowledge, and Innovation*. The white ethnic group experienced a poorer application of all HRM competencies, compared to the black Africa ethnic group.

Practical/managerial implications. The findings of the research highlighted the need for management to evaluate the current application of HR practices in the workplace, as well as the extent to which HR professionals are involved as strategic business partners.

Contribution/value-add. This research highlights the need for the improvement of the current application of HR competencies in South African workplaces.

Key Words: Business Intelligence, Human Resource Competencies, Human Resource Management, Leadership, Professionalism

INTRODUCTION

HR practitioners have an important role to play in the sustainability of organisations and the subsequent economic growth of any country through its people (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). The Global Competitiveness Report consistently gives South Africa poor rankings in terms of people development and HR practices. According to this report, South Africa is ranked 113 out of 144 countries for labour relations practices, 143rd for hiring and firing practices, due to rigidity, and 144th, for labour relations, due to significant tensions (World Economic Forum, 2014). It therefore appears that the HR profession is slow in making a strategic contribution, and may not be maintaining effectiveness and relevance in the South African context (Boudreau & Lawler, 2014).

The role that HR practitioners should play in organisations is an on-going debate (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). In line with the early work of Ulrich (1997), many scholars advocate that HR practitioners should be allowed to play a more strategic role in organisations (see De Nisi, Wilson, & Biteman, 2014; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Boudreau and Lawler (2014, p. 233) highlighted the fact that HR practitioners are not focusing on key strategic challenges in organisations, such as “improving productivity, increasing quality, facilitating mergers and acquisitions, managing knowledge, implementing change, developing business strategies and improving the ability of the organisation to execute strategies.” Moreover, Pohler and Willness (2014, p. 468) stated that HR being perceived as a “low-level, reactive, and cost-focused administrative function with little autonomy... and nothing more than a management control function.”

The available research emphasised the impact of poor HR practices on both individual-level and organisational-level outcomes in the South African context. Findings showed that poor human capital practices have a negative impact on psychological contracts, organisational commitment, work engagement, motivation, job satisfaction, happiness, meaningfulness, well-being, and retention of employees in various settings (Barkhuizen, Mogwere, & Schutte, 2014; Diseko, 2015; Kekgonegile, 2015; Magolego, Barkhuizen, & Lesenyeho, 2013; Mtila, Barkhuizen, & Mokgele, 2013; Saurombe, 2015; Smit, 2014). Poor HR

practices can impact significantly on employee performance (Magolego *et al.*, 2013; Masale, 2015) and, subsequently, on the quality of service delivery (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Smit, 2014).

In the light of the preceding, the need exists to explore the current application of HRM competencies in the South African workplace. Most of research in South African focused on the roles, responsibilities, and practices of HR professionals. Given the current criticisms surrounding the HR function, research should focus on exploring the underpinning competencies that are the building blocks of effective HR practices (Abdullah, 2014). The lack of detailed empirical research on HR competencies and functions is widely recognised (Abdullah, 2014; Abdullah, Musa, & Ali, 2011; O' Brien & Linehan, 2014).

The next section of the article will highlight some of the limited literature available on the application of HRM competencies in the South African workplace. Thereafter, a discussion of the research approach and research method of the present study will be provided. The article concludes with a discussion of the research results, as well as recommendations for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HRM role and competency requirements

Most of the literature to date is dominated by the extent to which HR practitioners are allowed to play a strategic versus an operational role in organisations. Many researchers have tested the original four-factor HR role model of Ulrich (1997) in various settings. According to this model, HR has four major roles to play, namely strategic partner, change agent (strategic roles), administrative expert, and employee champion (operational roles). The activities of a strategic partner are aimed at developing a HR strategy that is aligned with the business strategy of the organisation. HR practitioners as change agents focus on developing the capability of people and, consequently, the organisation. The role of an administrative expert focuses on the effective design and execution of HR processes,

whereas the employee champion function deals with the daily needs and problems of employees.

In the light of the above model, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) maintained that it is the role of the HR function to create value for investors and customers external to the organisation, and to create value for line managers and employees inside the organisation. This value is created through the facilitation of HR practices that focus on:

- **“the flow of people”** — ensuring the availability of talent to accomplish organisational strategy;
- **“the flow of performance management”** — promoting accountability for performance by defining and rewarding it;
- **“the flow of information”** — ensuring that employees are aware of what is occurring in the organisation, and can apply themselves to those things that create value; and
- **“the flow of work”** — providing the governance processes, accountability, and physical setting that ensure quality results (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005, p. 20).

Ulrich, Brockbank, Younger, and Ulrich (2013) recently revised the focus of the traditional model, to adapt it to the changing business world. According to the revised model, HR practitioners as strategic business partners are a “high-performing HR professionals” who should understand the global context. The capacity-building role includes the ability of HR professionals to define and build organisational capabilities. HR, as a change agent, needs to assist organisations with effective change processes and structures, whereas the innovation- and integrator roles require HR professionals to integrate HR business practices to support change initiatives.

The need for HR competence and professionalism is clearly highlighted in the revised roles proposed by Ulrich, Brockbank, Younger, and Ulrich (2012). While the role and function of HR has changed, the essential principles that guide HR (such as managing and developing the workforce) have remained unchanged, as the HR department must mobilise human capital and ensure that the organisational strategy is realised (Boudreau & Lawler, 2014).

This requires HR professionals to move away from “stubborn traditionalism,” to enhance much-needed change in HR competence, skills, strategic roles, and professionalism.

HR practitioners in developing countries are still fulfilling mainly operational roles (i.e. Tessema & Soeters, 2006), while those in developed countries are fulfilling more strategic roles (Du Plessis, Paine, & Botha, 2012; Thill, Venegas, & Groblshegg, 2014). In the South African, context Walters (2006) found that HR practitioners are mostly fulfilling the roles of administrative expert and employee champions, but are perceived as ineffective or incompetent in these roles. Steyn (2008) found similar results; however, Steyn’s study found that HR practitioners are moving towards fulfilling a more strategic role in organisations. A recent study by Abbott, Goosen, and Coetzee (2013), however, pointed out that many HR practitioners in South Africa are still focusing on the role of employee advocate in the workplace, without this role being extended.

Available research in the South African context points to lack of HRM competence and subsequent poor practices applied in the workplace. Schultz (2010) found that the HR department in a merged South African higher education institution displayed poor personal skills, HR business knowledge, and management skills. A study by van Wyk (2006) highlighted the lack of sufficient business knowledge of HR practitioners regarding social responsibility issues such as HIV/AIDS. The HR practitioners, however, acknowledged the importance of educating employees on social responsibility issues.

A study by Louw (2013) indicated that HR practitioners lack experience and competence in evaluating, executing, and reporting on HR interventions. As a result HR, practitioners cannot provide organisations with important data regarding the effectiveness of HR interventions (Field, Louw, Salie, & Slechter, 2013). Furthermore, organisations are of the opinion that data provided by HR are unreliable and lack integrity, and can therefore not be used (De Bruyn & Roodt, 2009).

The effective talent management of employees also remains an area of great concern. Several studies pointed out the lack of talent management in terms of poor training and development opportunities, poor performance management, poor workforce planning and acquisition, and ineffective retention strategies (Barkhuizen, 2015). These results can be explained by the fact that confusions still prevails as to who should take responsibility for talent management in organisations. Other factors include the lack of management commitment towards talent, bureaucratic organisational structures, and the non-recognition of HR's potential strategic value in a business partnership (SABPP, 2011).

H 1: HR competencies are poorly applied in the South African context

Human resources competencies and background variables

Limited research currently exists on the interactive relationships between HR competencies and background variables. Regarding age, research has shown that generation Y places emphasis on sound HRM practices regarding compensation and training and development (Barkhuizen, 2014). A study by Du Plessis and Barkhuizen (2012) on personal-level factors of HR practitioners showed that individuals aged 45 years and older displayed higher levels of hope and confidence than their younger counterparts. Further results showed that the white ethnic group scored higher on hope and confidence than black ethnic group, whereas the latter group displayed higher levels of resilience. Final results showed that HR practitioners employed at top management level displayed higher levels of psychological capital (i.e. hope, confidence, optimism, and resilience) than those employed at lower levels in the organisation (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2012).

H 2: Significant differences exist between HR practitioners and managers in the display of HR competencies, based on their demographic characteristics.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey research strategy of inquiry was utilised in this study, based on the need for exploratory research on the application HR competencies in the South African workplace (Field, 2009). Cross-sectional research occurs when data are collected from the research participants at a single point in time or during a single, relatively brief time period (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Sampling

The respondents were HR officers and managers from various organisations in the private and public sector who had knowledge about HRM processes in the workplace. The study employed purposive convenience sampling, whereby respondents were chosen based on their availability to participate and provide the desired information. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, and 483 were returned. A total of 481 questionnaires were usable for analysis. This represented a 60.13% response rate. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are reported in Table 5.1, below.

Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	213	44.3
	Female	265	55.1
Language	English	141	29.3
	Indigenous	339	70.5
Ethnicity	African	370	76.9
	Coloured	18	3.7
	Asian	11	2.3
	White	77	16.0
Age	20-29	59	12.3
	30-39	142	29.5
	40-49	139	28.9
	50 and more	68	14.1
Qualifications	Certificate	78	16.2

	Diploma	148	30.8
	Bachelor's degree	172	35.8
	Postgraduate qualification	70	14.6
Job level	Senior management	38	7.9
	Middle management	150	31.2
	Lower management	86	17.9
	Supervisory	77	16.0
	Operational	113	23.5
Years' work experience	0-5	75	15.6
	6-10	90	18.7
	11-15	92	19.1
	16-20	58	12.1
	21-25	78	16.2
	26-30	54	11.2
	30 years or more	31	6.4
Years in job	0-10	403	83.8
	11-20	60	12.5
	21-30	17	3.5
Years in organisation	0-10	308	64.0
	11-20	91	18.9
	21-30	79	16.4

The demographic characteristics of the respondents in this sample were as follows: 55.1% were women, 70.5% spoke indigenous languages, and 76.9% were black Africans. A total of 29.5% of the respondents were aged 30-39 years, 35.8% held a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational qualification, and 31.1% were employed at middle management level. Of the respondents, 37.8% had six to 15 years' work experience, 83.8% had been employed in their job for 0-10 years, and 64% had been employed with their current organisation for 0-10 years.

Measuring Instrument

A human resource professional competency questionnaire (Schutte, 2015) was used in this study. This questionnaire consisted of three sections and measure three core HR competency dimensions namely Professional behaviour and leadership, Service orientation and execution and Business intelligence. The Professional behaviour and leadership competency consist of four sub-competencies, namely *Leadership- and personal credibility* (8 items), *Solution creation* (4 items), *Interpersonal communication* (7 items), and *Innovation* (6 items). The Service orientation and execution competency consisted of four sub-competencies, namely *Talent management* (9 items), *HR risk* (5 items), *HR metrics* (6 items), and *HR service delivery* (6 items). The Business intelligence competency consisted of four sub-competencies, namely *Strategic impact* (11 items), *HR business knowledge* (10 items), *Business acumen* (6 items), and *HR technology* (3 items).

Responses were measured in a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” (1) to “Always” (5). The questionnaire has been validated for the South African context, and showed excellent reliabilities of above 0.90 for the underlying factors (Schutte, 2015).

Research Procedure

Permission was obtained from the necessary authorities prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Hard-copy and soft-copy surveys were distributed to the relevant participants. Ethical clearance was obtained prior to the administration of the surveys. Confidentiality was maintained at all times.

Statistical analyses

Data were analysed with the aid of SPSS (2015). Exploratory factor analyses were used to determine the underlying factor structure. Descriptive statistics (i.e. means, standard deviation, and kurtosis) were used to analyse the data. MANOVA was used to determine the significance of differences between the dimensions of the HRM Professional Competence Model for the demographic groups. MANOVA tests whether mean differences among

groups on a combination of dependent variables are likely to have occurred by chance (Field, 2009). When an effect was significant in MANOVA, one-way ANOVA was used to discover which dependent variables had been affected. T-tests were done to assess the differences between the groups in the sample. For purposes of the present research, we used Cohen's (1988, p. 283) guidelines for the interpretation of effect sizes: 0.0099 constitutes a small effect, 0.0588 a medium effect, and 0.1379 is a large effect.

RESULTS

The KMO analyses showed the following measures of sampling adequacy: *Professional behaviour and leadership* — .954, *Service orientation and execution* — .936, and *Business intelligence* — .950. These results were acceptable according to the guideline of a KMO higher than 0.6 being adequate for factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The results of the factor analyses are reported next.

Factor Analyses: *Professional behaviour and Leadership*. Exploratory factor analyses, using principal component analyses, were done on the 25 items of the *Professional behaviour and leadership* section of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent factor analysis with direct Oblimin rotation revealed four underlying factors, which explained 82.020% of the variance. Four items were deleted because of problematic loadings. The factors were labelled: *Interpersonal communication* (Factor 1), *Leadership- and personal credibility* (Factor 2), *Solution creation and implementation* (Factor 3), and *Innovation* (Factor 4). The items showed acceptable loadings.

Factor Analyses: *Service Orientation and Execution*. An exploratory factor analysis, using principal component analyses, was done on the 26 items of the *Service orientation and execution* section of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors. Six items were deleted due to problematic loadings. The four factors explained 81.636 % of the variance for the

measure. The factors were labelled *Talent management* (Factor1), *HR service delivery* (Factor 2), *HR metrics* (Factor 3), and *HR risk* (Factor, 4). The items showed acceptable loadings.

Factor Analyses: *Business Intelligence*. An exploratory factors analysis, using principal component analyses, was done on the 30 items of the *Business intelligence* section of the questionnaire. The initial analyses revealed that four factors could be extracted, based on the eigenvalues. A subsequent principal component factor analysis, using varimax rotation, was done to specify the four underlying factors. The four factors explained 74.417% of the variance. Two items were deleted because of problematic loadings. The factors were labelled as follows: *HR business knowledge* (Factor 1), *Strategic impact* (Factor 2), *Business acumen* (Factor 3) and *HR technology* (Factor 4). The items showed acceptable loadings.

The descriptive statistics of the factors are reported in Table 5.2, below.

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of the competency dimensions and sub-competencies

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
<i>Professional behaviour and leadership</i>					
Leadership- and personal credibility	3.3059	.94722	-.289	-.042	.960
Solution creation	3.2469	.96972	-.128	-.114	.882
Interpersonal communication	3.3358	1.03634	-.075	-.649	.959
Innovation	2.9508	1.04200	.268	-.598	.895
<i>Service orientation and execution</i>					
Talent management	2.7914	1.05855	.098	-.775	.942
HR risk	3.2416	.92427	-.073	-.151	.916
HR metrics	2.8101	1.05672	.216	-.682	.897
HR service delivery	3.3714	.96516	-.486	-.109	.945
<i>Business intelligence</i>					
Strategic impact	3.1335	.81812	-.115	.343	.933
HR business knowledge	3.4940	.92866	-.379	-.077	.953
HR business acumen	2.9567	.95180	.203	-.168	.944
HR technology	3.0825	1.00618	-.260	-.282	.915

The results, provided in Table 5.2, showed acceptable to excellent reliabilities for all the dimensions of the HRM Professional Competence Model. The respondents indicated that most of the dimensions are applied moderately. The most problematic factors were *Innovation, Talent management, HR metrics, and HR business knowledge.*

Next, a gap analysis was performed to determine whether significant differences existed between the importance and the current application of the HRM dimensions. The results, provided in Table 5.3, showed no significant differences between the current applications versus the importance of HRM competencies.

Table 5.3: Gap analyses – Current versus the importance of HRM Competencies

	Mean importance	Mean current	Difference	p	eta
<i>Professional behaviour and leadership</i>					
Leadership- and personal credibility	4.0257	3.3059	0.7198	.422	.069
Solution creation	3.9858	3.2469	0.7389	.083	.050
Interpersonal communication	4.0304	3.3358	0.6946	.351	.052
Innovation	3.9586	2.9508	1.0078	.387	.027
<i>Service orientation and execution</i>					
Talent management	3.918	2.7914	1.1266	.368	.075
HR risk	3.966	3.2416	0.7244	.224	.048
HR metrics	3.8274	2.8101	1.0173	.368	.049
HR service delivery	3.9184	3.3714	0.547	.231	.057
<i>Business intelligence</i>					
Strategic Impact	3.9181	3.1335	0.7846	.287	.091
HR business knowledge	4.0582	3.494	0.5642	.753	.057
HR business acumen	3.9716	2.9567	1.0149	.682	.023
HR technology	3.8723	3.0825	0.7898	.546	.023

Next, the results of the MANOVA of the differences between the current application of the HRM professional dimensions (i.e. Professional Behaviour and Leadership; Service Orientation and Delivery; Business Intelligence) and demographics groups are reported.

MANOVA Analyses: *Professional Behaviour and Leadership*

The results in Table 5.4 show that the respondents differed significantly regarding the current application of HR competencies, according to the variables *home language*, *ethnicity*, and *job level*. Further *post hoc* analyses showed no significant differences related to the variables *home language* and *ethnicity*. The remainder of the results of the *post hoc* analyses is reported below.

Table 5.4: Manova Analyses – Professionalism and Leadership and Demographic Groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Gender	.985	1.801 ^b	4.000	473.000	.127	.015
Home language	.936	8.090 ^b	4.000	475.000	.000*	.064
Ethnicity	.933	2.067	16.000	1430.401	.008*	.017
Age	.966	1.167	12.000	1061.238	.302	.011
Qualification	.956	1.730	12.000	1219.983	.055	.015
Job level	.943	1.686	16.000	1393.741	.043*	.015
Years' work experience	.935	1.138	28.000	1685.215	.282	.017
Years in current job	.972	1.706 ^b	8.000	948.000	.093	.014
Years in current organisation	.977	1.374 ^b	8.000	944.000	.204	.012

* Significant differences

Wilks's lambda for the variable *home language* was .936 [$F_{(1, 481)} = 8.090$; $p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *Leadership- and personal credibility* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 6.565$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .026$], *Solution creation* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 16.859$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .023$], *Interpersonal communication* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 3.972$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .062$], and *Innovation* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 8.203$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .029$]. The English language group were of the view that HR practitioners display the following leadership competencies: *Solution creation*, *Interpersonal communication*, and *Innovation* less effectively, compared to respondents from the indigenous languages group. The effects were small.

Wilks's lambda for the variable *ethnicity* was .933 [$F_{(1, 481)} = 2.067$; $p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed in terms of *Leadership- and personal credibility* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 3.699$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .030$], *Solution creation* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 3.783$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .031$], and *Innovation* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 3.296$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .027$]. The black African ethnic group rated HR practitioners' display of the leadership competencies *Solution creation* and *Innovation* as more effective than what the white ethnic group did. The effects were small.

MANOVA Analyses: *Service Orientation and Execution*

The results, provided in Table 5.5, showed that the respondents differed significantly regarding the current application of HR competencies, according to the variables *home language, age, qualifications, and job level*. Further *post hoc* analyses showed no significant differences according to *age* and *job level*. The remainder of the results of the *post hoc* analyses is reported below.

Table 5.5: Manova Analyses – Service Orientation and execution and Demographic Groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	<i>p</i>	Partial eta squared
Gender	.988	1.454 ^b	4.000	473.000	.215	.012
Home language	.953	5.879 ^b	4.000	475.000	.000*	.047
Ethnicity	.953	1.406	16.000	1430.401	.130	.012
Age	.936	2.255	12.000	1061.238	.008*	.022
Qualification	.981	.745	12.000	1219.983	.707	.006
Job level	.952	1.423	16.000	1393.741	.122	.012
Years' work experience	.920	1.404	28.000	1685.215	.078	.021
Years in current job	.965	2.132 ^b	8.000	948.000	.031*	.018
Years in current organisation	.976	1.450 ^b	8.000	944.000	.172	.012

* Significant differences

Wilks's Lambda for *home language* was .953 [$F_{(1, 481)} = 5.879$; $p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *Talent management* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 8.416$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .017$], *HR risk* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 21.816$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .044$], *HR metrics* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 13.836$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .028$], and *HR service delivery* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 6.194$; $p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .013$]. The English language group indicated that HR practitioners display the competencies *Talent management*, *HR risk*, *HR metrics*, and *HR service delivery* less effectively, compared to the indigenous languages group. The effects were small.

MANOVA Analyses: *Business Intelligence*

The results, provided in Table 5.6, showed that the respondents differed significantly regarding the current application of *Business intelligence*, based on the variables *home language* and *age*. Further *post hoc* analyses showed no significant differences according to the variable *age*. The remainder of the results of the *post hoc* analyses is reported below.

Table 5.6: Manova Analyses – Business Intelligence and Demographic Groups

	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p.	Partial eta squared
Gender	.995	.648 ^b	4.000	472.000	.629	.005
Home language	.957	5.322 ^b	4.000	474.000	.000*	.043
Ethnicity	.950	1.521	16.000	1427.346	.084	.013
Age	.940	2.070	12.000	1058.592	.016*	.020
Qualification	.975	.965	12.000	1217.337	.480	.008
Job level	.955	1.320	16.000	1390.686	.176	.011
Years' work experience	.926	1.303	28.000	1681.609	.134	.019
Years in current job	.983	1.035 ^b	8.000	946.000	.407	.009
Years in current organisation	.987	.748 ^b	8.000	942.000	.649	.006

* Significant differences

Wilks's Lambda for *home language* was .957 [$F_{(, .481)} = 5.322; p \leq 0.05$]. Analysis of each dependent variable, using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of 0.025, showed that the groups differed regarding *Strategic impact* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 7.749; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .024$], *HR business knowledge* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 17.002; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .041$], *Business acumen* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 8.978; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .021$], and *HR Technology* [$F_{(3, 481)} = 8.934; p \leq 0.05$; partial $\eta^2 = .018$]. The English language group indicated that HR practitioners display the competencies *Strategic impact*, *HR business knowledge*, *Business acumen*, and *HR technology* less effectively, compared to the indigenous languages group. The effects were small.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this research manuscript was to explore the extent to which HR practitioners display HR competencies in public- and private-sector organisations. Secondly, this research aimed to determine whether significant differences exist between the respondents' perceptions of HR competencies, based on their demographic characteristics.

The results of this research show that HR practitioners are only allowed to display HR competencies to a low or moderate extent in organisations. More specifically, HR practitioners are limited in applying innovation, talent management, HR metrics, and HR business knowledge. These results concur with those of previous studies that found HR professionals are still not allowed to play a strategic role in South African organisations, and, as a result, HR competencies and practices are poorly applied (see Barkhuizen, 2015; Schultz, 2010; van Wyk, 2006; Walters, 2006).

These results are concerning, given that the respondents ranked all the HR competencies as important. Although the results revealed no significant differences between the current application versus the importance of HR competencies, public-sector organisations should improve their current HR practices to improve both individual and organisational outcomes.

The results showed that the respondents differed significantly in their perceptions of the current application of HR competencies, based on the variable *home language*. The predominant finding in this research was that significant differences existed between respondents from the English language group (representative of the white ethnic group) and respondents from the indigenous languages group (representative of the black African ethnic group). The English language group were of the view that all HR competencies (i.e. leadership- and personal credibility, solution creation, interpersonal communication, innovation, talent management, HR risk, HR metrics, HR service delivery, strategic impact, HR business knowledge, business acumen, and HR technology) are significantly less effectively applied, compared to the view of the indigenous languages group.

These results are a reflection of the current realities within the South African context. As mentioned previously, the public sector has been subjected to numerous changes since the establishment of the new South African democratic dispensation in 1994, which resulted in various practices to address the past imbalances in the workforce. Affirmative action resulted in numerous white employees being retrenched to ensure employment equity in the government sector. As a result, the remaining minority of whites may view the application of HR practices as less effective, compared to other ethnic groups. These results, however, need to be interpreted with caution. More research is needed to clarify the significant differences between white and black ethnic groups in terms of the application of HR practices. These results confirm that significant differences may exist between respondents in their perceptions of the application of HR competencies and practices in the South African workplace (see Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2012).

This research makes important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a theoretical perspective, this research adds to the body of emerging research on the current status of HRM in South African organisations. Many researchers have debated the application of HR practices in South African workplaces without empirically investigating these. The present research provides sound empirical knowledge and facts on the competence requirements and subsequent effectiveness of HR practitioners in South African workplaces. This research makes an important methodological contribution by proving the

utility of a new measure for HR competencies in the South African workplace. This research also adds important practical value in highlighting the problematic areas of HRM in public- and private-sector organisations and by making suggestions for the improvement thereof, to ensure sound HR competence and service delivery.

This research has some limitations. First, the convenience sampling technique used in this research limits the research in terms of generalising its findings to the total population. Second, this research used a cross-sectional design, which limited diagnosing cause-and-effect relationships between variables. Future research can benefit from longitudinal studies to predict the cause and effect of findings, especially among different ethnic groups in South Africa. Future research can also benefit from cross-national studies to benchmark HR practices with those of other African countries. Such research will benefit Africa as a developing continent, as sound HR practices play a key role in the competitiveness and sustainability of organisations and countries. Future research can also expand on the current study by including individual-level and organisational-level variables to predict the key outcomes of HR competencies in South African workplaces.

In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of the HR function in the South African work context. Organisations can reap the long-term benefits from a strategic partnership with HR in the form of competitiveness and sustainability. The findings of this research re-emphasise the need for business leaders to take stock of their current HR practices and the extent to which HR practitioners are allowed to play a strategic role in their organisations.

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Chapter 6:

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to draw conclusions from the four articles that made up this study. Conclusions are drawn in accordance with the research objectives. Furthermore, limitations of this study are discussed, and recommendations for organisation are made. Finally, research opportunities that emanated from this research are presented.

6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research was to develop a diagnostic tool for the assessment of competencies required for HR professionals in the South African context.

The objectives of this study were to:

- explore the intricacies of HRM as a managerial profession in South Africa;
- to determine the competencies required to develop a HR professional competency model;
- determine the extent to which a HRM competency model and measure is valid in the multicultural South African context; and
- determine the extent to which South African HR practitioners are currently allowed to demonstrate HR competencies in the workplace.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

Next, the conclusions of the empirical studies are presented. The conclusions are presented per research objective set for this study.

6.3.1 Intricacies of HRM as a managerial profession in South Africa

The term *profession* emerged in the early 1950s from the sociological studies of professions by Everett Hughes to position the social recognition and status of professions (Louw, 1990, p. 9). Several decades later, scholars, researchers, and practitioners are still in disagreement on what exactly the terms *profession*, *professionalisation*, and *professional* refer to (Harrison, 2007). Cheetham and Chivers (2005, p. vii) provided a comprehensive definition of a profession by referring to it as

“...an occupation based upon specialised study, training or experience, the purpose of which is to apply skilled service or advice to others, or to provide technical, managerial or administrative services to, or within, organisations in return for a fee or salary.”

Fanning (2011) postulated nine features that define the field of HRM in its drive towards professionalism in the USA and the UK. These are: (1) a governing body, (2) certification, education, and training, (3) a body of knowledge, (4) a code of ethics and discipline, (5) legal status, (6) a research base, (7) independence, (8) a contribution to society, and (9) recognition. After extensive research, Fanning (2011) concluded that the HRM discipline was semi-professional; while it scored highly on many of the nine dimensions of a profession, it did not score highly on everything. Fanning (2011) specifically drew attention to the fact that practising HRM does not require a licence, and expulsion from the governing body would not prohibit an individual from practising.

Applied within the South African context, a similar situation is observed. Currently, the “professional” HR bodies are limited in terms of independence, their contribution to society, their body of knowledge, and research. Furthermore, the professional bodies lack legal status and recognition by the wider public. In line with the opinion of Hodson and Sullivan, (2012) HRM is an occupational group in South Africa that displays some characteristics of a profession and is, therefore, in the process of professionalisation.

6.3.2 Development and pilot testing of a HRM competency model and measure

The subject of competencies has been a topic of examination and study since the 1950s. Kochanski (2009) defined competencies as the success factors that enable the assessment, feedback, development, and reward of individuals. According to Mansfield, (2005, p. 14), competencies are the manifestation of “an underlying ability or trait, and the behavioral indicators describe specific ways in which that ability or trait is demonstrated.” Schutte (2015) postulated that there is a symbiotic relationship amongst four categories of factors: the individual’s competence, the individual’s occupational specifications, the social context, and the HR practitioner’s actions or schemes and logic of actions and behaviour. HR practitioners have to realise their proficiency and meet the organisation’s and its people’s

needs. Furthermore their conduct has to show an understanding of the environment in which they are operating.

Currently, there is a global divergence of opinion regarding the competence requirements for HR professionals. Moreover, the interchangeable use of jargon relating to HR roles, responsibilities, functions, practices, and competencies amplifies the need to develop a holistic and empirically tested HR professional competence models for the global context and such the South African context (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014).

In the present research study, a hypothesised competence model was developed to provide a holistic perspective on the competence requirements for South African HR practitioners. The results of the factor analyses revealed three distinguishable dimensions of HRM professional competencies, which were labelled *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. The results confirmed five factors for the *Professional behaviour and leadership* dimension, namely *Leadership- and personal credibility*, *Organisational capability*, *Solution creation*, *Interpersonal communication*, and *Citizenship*, which were in line with the SABPP's model (Meyer, 2012). All competencies showed good to excellent reliabilities.

The results of the factors analyses of *Service orientation and execution* contradicted the recommendation of the SABPP competency model that *Strategic contribution* should form part of HR capabilities such as service orientation and. Four factors were identified for *Service delivery and execution*. These were *Talent management*, *HR Risk*, *HR Service Delivery* and *HR service delivery*. The factors showed excellent reliabilities. Finally, the factor analysis for *Business intelligence* dimension confirmed three underlying factors, namely *Strategic contribution*, *HR business knowledge*, and *HR technology*. All factors showed excellent reliabilities. In contrast with the model of the SABPP (2012), we suggest that *Strategic contribution* form part of *Business intelligence*. The three factors showed excellent reliabilities. The results are also in line with those of other researchers who highlighted the importance of business knowledge and technological acumen as HRM competencies (Lee & Yu, 2013).

In the light of the above results, we can conclude that the competence model is a reliable instrument that can be used to detect the current competence levels of HR practitioners in the workplace.

6.3.3 Validation of a HRM competence model

The literature review showed that empirical research on competence requirements for HR practitioners in the South African context has not been forthcoming. The few detailed empirical research studies that currently exist focused primarily on the roles that HR practitioners should fulfil in South African organisations, and the practices they should employ. Furthermore, the results of these studies show the confusion that exists regarding the roles and responsibilities of HR practitioners and their lack of competence to fulfil key roles.

Therefore, the need existed to establish and empirically validate a HR professional competence model that can be applied in the South African context. The SABPP introduced a new competency model in 2012, to guide the professional conduct and training of HR practitioners in the South African context (Meyer, 2012). Schutte (2015) used the above model in conjunction with other competency models to develop a competency measure as a foundation to develop a holistic model that HR professionals can use in the professionalisation of the HR discipline in South Africa.

The results showed three distinguishable HR competency dimensions for the HR Professional Competence Model, namely *Professional behaviour and leadership*, *Service orientation and execution*, and *Business intelligence*. Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted into four factors for the *Professional behaviour and leadership* dimension. These were: *Leadership- and personal credibility*, *Solution creation*, *Interpersonal communication*, and *Innovation*. These results contradict the original hypothesised model of Schutte (2015) and the SABPP's, in which *Organisational capabilities* form part of the *Professional behaviour and leadership* dimension. The results also confirm the findings of the study by Schultz (2010), who found that management skills are an important HR competency for HR professionals.

Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted into four factors for the *Service orientation and execution* dimension. The four factors, for both language groups, were labelled *Talent management*, *HR risk*, *HR metrics*, and *HR service delivery*. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. These results confirm the original hypothesised model of Schutte *et al.* (2015) regarding a four-factor solution for *Service orientation and execution* dimension. These results also partially confirm that *HR capabilities* section of the SABPP model, except that *Strategic impact* should not form part of *Service orientation and execution*.

Exploratory factor analyses, using varimax rotation, resulted into four factors for the *Business intelligence* dimension. The four factors, for both language groups, were labelled *Strategic impact*, *HR business knowledge*, *Business acumen*, and *HR technology*. The results of the target rotations on the rotated component matrices of the four factors showed construct equivalence for both language groups. All factors showed excellent reliabilities. These results partially confirm the original three-factor model of Schutte (2015) in this regard, but the addition of the factor *Business acumen* resulted in a four-factor solution for *Business intelligence*. The results are also in line with those of Van Wyk (2006) and Schultz (2010), who found business knowledge to be an important HR professional competency in the South African context.

The confirmed hypothesised model for this study is displayed in Figure 6.1, below:

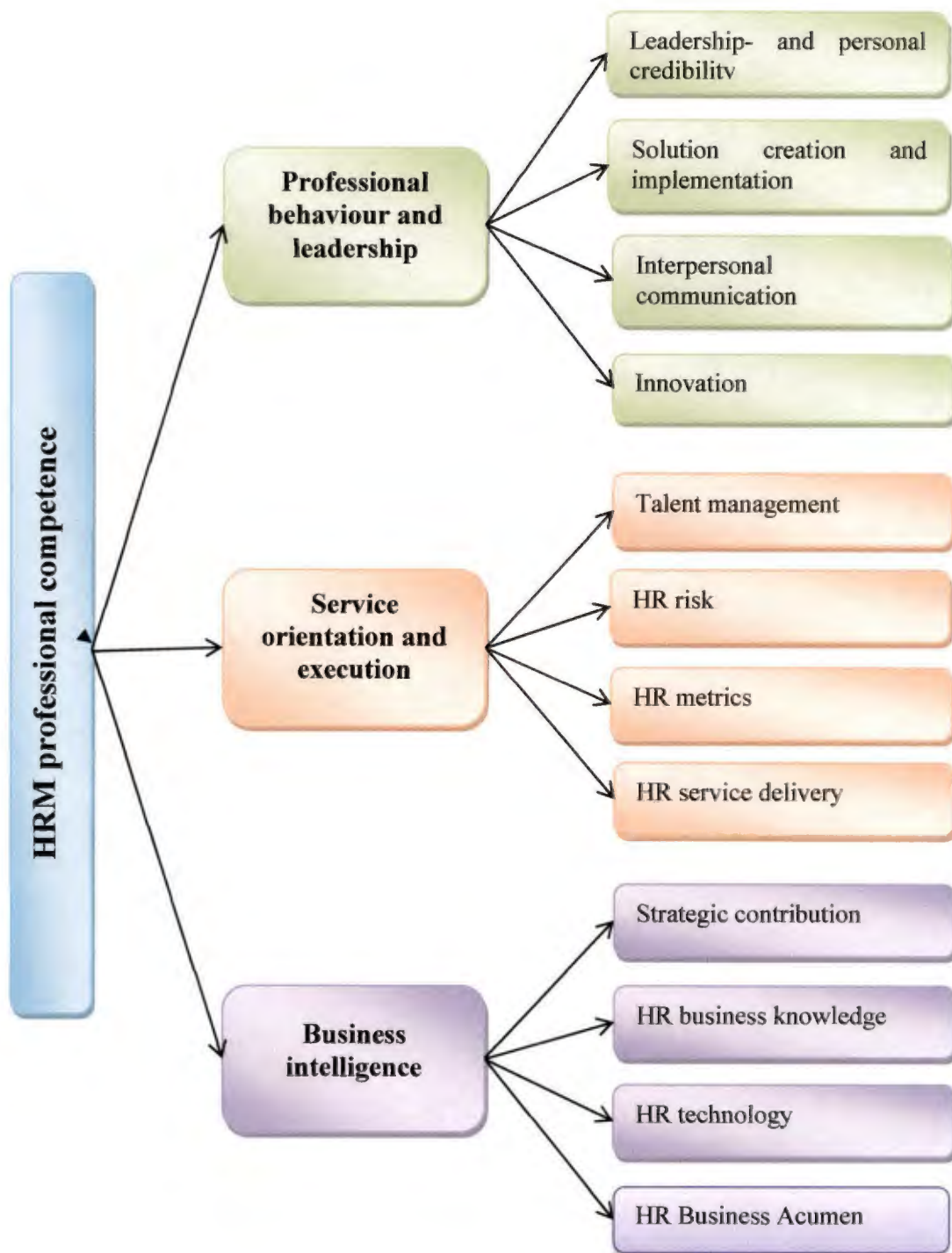


Figure 6.1: Hypothesised model for the study

The MANOVA analyses showed significant differences between the respondents' perceptions of HR competencies, based on their demographic characteristics. The predominant finding was that Generation Y employees viewed HR competencies as less important, compared to older generations. These results contradict previous findings that younger generations view HR practices as more important than other age groups (Barkhuizen, 2014; Masibigiri & Nienaber, 2011). These results are concerning, as younger generations have a faster employment turnover than older generations.

The results further show that employees with a higher-level qualification viewed *Leadership and personal credibility*, *Solution creation*, *Interpersonal communication*, *Innovation*, *HR risk*, *HR service delivery*, *Strategic impact*, *HR business knowledge*, *Business acumen*, and *HR technology* as more important than did employees with a lower level of qualification. Furthermore, middle-management respondents viewed *HR metrics* as more important than those employed on operational level did. Finally, those who had 11 to 15 years of work experience regarded *Solution creation* as more important than those with 0 to five years of work experience. The results confirm previous findings that employees in higher ranks in organisations and with more years of work experience regard HR practices as more important, compared to those in lower ranks of employment (Barkhuizen & Veldsman, 2012).

6.3.4 Current application of HRM competencies

The role that HR professionals should play in organisation is an on-going debate (O' Brien & Linehan, 2014). In line with the early work of Ulrich (1997), many scholars advocate HR practitioners being allowed to play a more strategic role in organisations (see De Nisi, Wilson, & Biteman, 2014; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Boudreau and Lawler (2014, p. 233) highlighted that HR practitioners are not focusing on key strategic challenges in organisations, such as "improving productivity, increasing quality, facilitating mergers and acquisitions, managing knowledge, implementing change, developing business strategies and improving the ability of the organisation to execute strategies. Moreover, Pohler and Willness (2014, p. 468) postulated that HR is perceived as a "low-level, reactive, and cost-

focused administrative function with little autonomy ... and nothing more than a management control function.”

The results showed that HR practitioners are only allowed to display HR competencies to a low or moderate extent in organisations. HR practitioners appear to be limited in terms of innovation, implementing talent management practices, HR metrics systems, and displaying business knowledge. These results confirm those of previous studies that found that HR professionals are still not allowed to play a strategic role in South African organisations, and, as a result, HR competencies and practices are poorly applied (see Schultz, 2010; Walters, 2006).

The results showed that the respondents differed significantly in their perceptions of the current application of HR competencies, based on the variable *home language*. The predominant finding in this research was that significant differences exist between the English language group (representative of the white ethnic group) and the indigenous languages group (representative of the black African ethnic group). The English language group indicated that all HR competencies (i.e. leadership competencies, solution creation and implementation, communication, innovation, talent management capabilities, HR risk capabilities, HR metrics capabilities, HR service capabilities, strategic impact capabilities, business knowledge, business acumen and technological abilities) are significantly less effectively applied, compared to the indigenous languages group.

These results are a reflection of the current realities within the South African context. As mentioned previously, the public sector has been subjected to numerous changes since the establishment of the new South African democratic dispensation in 1994, which resulted in various practices to address the past imbalances in the workforce. Affirmative action resulted in numerous white employees being retrenched to ensure employment equity in the government sector. As a result the remaining minority of whites may view the application of HR practices as less effective, compared to the rest of the ethnic groups. These results however need to be interpreted with caution. More research is needed to clarify the

significant differences between white and black ethnic groups in terms of the application of HR practices. These results confirm that significant differences can exist between respondents in their perceptions of the application of HR competencies and practices in the South African workplace (see Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2012).

6.4 LIMITATIONS

As with any research, this study also has some limitations

Firstly, the present study adopted a cross-sectional research design, which allowed the identification of relationships between variables at one point in time only. Consequently, more complex forms of non-recursive linkages could not be examined. At best, these relationships could only be analysed and described. Therefore the relationships in the present study serve only to indicate certain patterns of the different variables.

Secondly, the present study was based on self-reports, as was done in the majority of other HR competence studies (Abdullah, 2014). Self-report data might be contaminated by common method variance, because both independent and dependent variables are based upon one source of information, i.e. the participants (Field, 2009). However, in general, a fairly high consistency exists between the objective and subjective ratings of variables, such as the ones used in the present study, and pose no real threat with regard to the findings obtained (Dollard & Winefield, 1998).

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5.1 Recommendations to solve the research problems

The results of this research show that the SABPP and IPM are still semi-professional organisations, but evolving towards recognition as professional bodies. In supporting both institutions in their quest to be recognised as professional bodies in South Africa, the following recommendations are made.

- All individuals conducting HR practices in South Africa should become members of a professional HR body, to ensure compliance and service excellence; this should be implemented and regulated.
- There should be a requirement that practitioners abide by a code of ethics that includes practice standards in the delivery of services to clients
- The SABPP and IPM must ensure that members are sufficiently competent to rely on their own judgment, based on relevant knowledge and being able to identify the suitable method for dealing with the problem at hand.
- Training institutions could encourage participation in professional activities by establishing, in conjunction with the SABPP and the IPM, student forums or associations, which will, in turn, increase awareness of the latest trends and developments.
- The SABPP and IPM should be protected by laws that make it illegal to practise without a formal licence.
- The current HR governing bodies must be recognised as holding a trustworthy position by the community they serve.
- The IPM and SABPP should establish a clear body of knowledge, distinctive to the profession, which can be acquired through a system of professional education and training.
- Both the IPM and SABPP should focus on research to increase and refine practitioners' knowledge base.
- Public recognition must be gained, as this is a significant precursor to a professionalisation.

The results show that HR practitioners are only allowed to display HR competencies to a low or moderate extent in organisations. HR practitioners appear to be limited in displaying the ability to innovate, implement talent management practices, employ HR metrics systems, and display business knowledge. A greater awareness should be created in organisations of the strategic roles and subsequent value-add of HR professionals as business partners. However, this can only be achieved when HRM in South Africa gains acknowledgement as a

profession.

The results also show a divergence of opinion regarding the importance and current application of HRM practices in a diverse South African workplace. In this context, it is recommended that HR practices be transparently applied across all management levels, ethnic groups, and generations in the workplace, to enhance equity for all South African citizens in the workplace. HR practices that are effectively applied will yield positive outcomes for both the individual and the broader organisation.

6.5.2 Recommendations for future research

The following recommendations are made for future research:

- This research should be expanded to other African and international countries for further validation. The present research tested construct equivalence between only two language groups — English and indigenous languages. For future research, it is recommended that the sample be expanded to include Afrikaans-speaking individuals, to further test equivalence. Future research can benefit from testing the interactive relationship between HR practices and key individual-level and organisation-level variables.
- Future studies should also test the impact of the new HR Professional Competence Model on key individual and organisational outcomes. Current research in South Africa is fragmented, and focused only on certain portions of HR roles and responsibilities. More research is needed to determine the holistic impact of HRM competencies in South African workplaces.

6.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research objectives for this study have been achieved. HRM has an important role to play in the competitiveness and sustainability of organisations through its people. This can only be achieved through clearly defined HR professional competencies. This research presented a validated measure for the assessment of the required HRM competencies in the South Africa context that will enable the advancement of HR professionalism and the subsequent value-add of HR practitioners.

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