

ROLES AND WELLNESS OF HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

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REMARKS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The referencing, as well as the editorial style as prescribed by the *Publication Manual* (5th edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA) was followed in this thesis. This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) to use APA style in all scientific documents.
- The thesis is submitted in the form of three research articles.

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SUMMARY

Topic: Roles and wellness of human resource professionals

Key terms: Work wellness, performance, burnout, engagement, workaholism, stress, strain, job demands, job resources, human resource practitioners, human resource roles.

The continuous alignment of human resource strategies, activities, processes and competencies within an ever-changing business environment poses certain challenges for the human resource profession in a global petrochemical industry. Modern business managers have realised the necessity of work wellness initiatives and that a relationship exists between employee wellness and business results, but very few companies measure whether such initiatives actually had any impact on work performance.

Defining performance indicators and competence models for human resource practitioners has developed into a dynamic activity. Adaptation to continuously changing business needs has the potential to create a sense of incompetence, exhaustion, decreased motivation and dysfunctional work attitudes, collectively defined as burnout. This highlights the need to identify and research psychological constructs that hold predictable value for the ability of human resource practitioners to prevent and overcome burnout by generating sufficient emotional energy to adapt to changing business needs, acquiring strategic human resource competencies to increase their feelings of professional efficacy and increasing their contribution towards organisational performance.

The objective of this study was to determine perceived importance and actual performance of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company in terms of human resource roles, and to determine the influence of work wellness (burnout, engagement and workaholism) on the perceived value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company.

The research method for each of the three articles of this study consisted of a brief literature review and an empirical study. Stratified samples were taken of human resource personnel ($N = 128$) and their internal line customers ($N = 67$). The measuring instruments used in this study included the Ulrich Human Resource Role Assessment Survey (HRRAS), Maslach

Burnout Inventory-General Survey (MBI-GS), Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the Workaholism Scale. Article 1 compared perceptions of human resource practitioners and their internal customers regarding expected and actual contributions of human resource practitioners towards business performance in a global petrochemical company. It was found that human resource practitioners and their line customers are in agreement concerning the importance of the human resource roles that enable business performance, indicating that human resource practitioners have a good understanding of their job requirements. Both human resource practitioners and their line customers perceived the performance of human resource practitioners as average, which is lower than the expected level of performance as indicated by importance scales.

In Article 2, a correlation study revealed that burnout (Exhaustion, Professional Efficacy and Cynicism) statistically significantly predicted the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation. It was found that Cynicism was a statistically significant predictor of the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation in terms of all the human resource roles (Strategic Partnering, Administrative Support, Employee Support and Change Management). Vigour and Dedication statistically significantly predicted perceived performance on the Administrative Support role.

In Article 3, a three-factor model of workaholism (consisting of Compulsiveness, Involvement and Overwork) was found which showed positive relationship with burnout factors. Statistical analysis indicated that workaholism factors of the Workaholism Scale practically significantly correlate. Multiple regression analysis showed that burnout and workaholism factors can explain perceptions of human resource practitioner performance.

Recommendations were made for future research.

OPSOMMING

Onderwerp: Rolle en werkverwante welstand van mensehulpbron-praktisyns

Sleutelwoorde: Werkverwante welstand, werkprestasie, uitbranding, werkbegeestering, werkholisme, werkeise, werkhulpbronne, mensehulpbron-praktisyns, mensehulpbron-rolle.

Volgehoue belyning van mensehulpbron-strategieë, aktiwiteite, prosesse en kundigheid in 'n voortdurend veranderende besigheidsomgewing bring verskeie uitdagings vir die mensehulpbron-professie in 'n internasionale petrochemiese maatskappy mee. Moderne besigheidsbestuurders het bewus geraak van die belangrikheid van werkwelstand-inisiatiewe en besigheidsresultate, maar min organisasies meet uiteindelik of sulke inisiatiewe enige invloed op werksprestasie het.

Beskrywing van prestasie-indikators en vaardigheidsmodelle vir mensehulpbron-praktisyns het tot 'n dinamiese aktiwiteit ontwikkel. Aanpassing by voortdurend veranderende besigheid vereistes kan potensieel lei tot gevoelens van onbevoegdheid, uitputting, verlaagde motivering en disfunksionele houdings teenoor werk, wat kollektief gedefinieer word as "uitbranding". Die behoefte aan navorsing oor wat voorspellingswaarde vir die vermoëns en werkwelstand van mensehulpbron-praktisyns inhou om hulle persoonlike doeltreffendheid en hulle bydrae tot organisasiedoelmatigheid te verhoog, word hierdeur beklemtoon.

Die doel van die studie was om persepsies rakende die belangrikheid en werklike prestasie van mensehulpbron-praktisyns met betrekking tot mensehulpbron-rolle, asook die invloed van werkverwante welstand (uitbranding, werkbegeestering en werkholisme) op die bydrae van mensehulpbron-praktisyns tot besigheidsresultate in 'n internasionale petrochemiese organisasie te bepaal.

Die navorsingsmetode wat in elkeen van die drie artikels gevolg is, sluit 'n bondige literatuuroorsig en 'n empiriese studie in. Gestratifiseerde steekproewe ($N=128$) is getrek van mensehulpbron-personeel en hul interne lynkliënte. Die Mensehulpbron Rolevaluering Opname, Maslach Uitbrandingsvraelys – Algemene Skaal, Utrecht Werkbegeesteringskaal en 'n Werkholismeskaal is as meetinstrumente gebruik. Persepsies van mensehulpbron-praktisyns en hulle interne kliënte ten opsigte van verwagte en werklike bydraes van

mensehulpbron-praktisyns tot besigheidsprestasië in 'n internasionale petrochemiese maatskappy is in Artikel 1 vergelyk. Daar is gevind dat mensehulpbron-personeel en hulle kliënte saamstem oor die belangrikheid van die rolle wat mensehulpbron-personeel behoort te vervul. Beide mensehulpbron-personeel en hulle kliënte ervaar die huidige prestasievlak van mensehulpbron-afdelings as gemiddeld, wat laer is as die verwagte vlak van prestasie, soos aangedui deur persepsies rakende die belangrikheid van mensehulpbron-rolle.

'n Korrelasiestudie in Artikel 2 het aangedui dat uitbrandingsfaktore (Uitputting, Professionele Effektiwiteit en Sinisme) statisties betekenisvolle voorspellingswaarde inhou met betrekking tot persepsies ten opsigte van prestasievlakke van mensehulpbron-praktisyns in die organisasie. Daar is gevind dat Sinisme statisties betekenisvolle voorspellingswaarde inhou ten opsigte van die persepsies rakende prestasievlakke van mensehulpbron-praktisyns in die organisasie met betrekking tot al die mensehulpbron-rolle en dat Energie en Toewyding statisties betekenisvolle voorspellingswaarde vir prestasie inhou ten opsigte van die Administratiewe rol.

In Artikel 3 is 'n drie-faktor Werkholismeskaal (bestaande uit Kompulsiwiteit, Werkbetrokkenheid en Oorwerk) met positiewe verwantskappe in terme van uitbranding faktore gevind. Statistiese ontleding het aangedui dat prakties betekenisvolle korrelasies bestaan tussen werkholisme-faktore van die Werkholismeskaal (Kompulsiwiteit, Werkbetrokkenheid en Oorwerk). Meervoudige regressie analise het getoon dat uitbranding en werkholisme faktore persepsies van mensehulpbron-praktisyns se prestasie kan verklaar.

Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing is aan die hand gedoen.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the influence of work-related well-being on the perceived value-adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical organisation.

The background to the study and the problem statement is discussed in this chapter. This chapter also deals with the research objectives and the significance of the study. The research method is explained, and the chapter layout provided.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A variety of literature describes competencies and performance levels expected from human resource practitioners in modern organisations (Bramson, 2000; Childre, Cryer, & Cooper, 2000; Gratton, 2000; Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Treen, 2000; Ulrich, 1997). According to Ulrich (1997), globalisation and the influence of technological development on time and communication, new competitive challenges, and fast-changing corporate cultures over the past 10 years have made it necessary for managers to manage performance across national cultures. Ulrich (1997) is of opinion that this has changed the role organisations expect human resource practitioners to fulfil to support business strategies, implying the need for a different set of organisational enabling competencies for human resource practitioners (Treen, 2000). Ulrich (1997) suggests that the set of competencies for human resource practitioners, as subsequently described, will enable human resource departments to add value and deliver results in the modern business environment.

Critical performance indicators and competency models for human resource departments are no longer determined independently by human resource directors, but by business managers (Lawler & Finegold, 2000). One competency, as Gratton (2000) suggests, is that human resource practitioners must be able to display business mastery as strategic partners by evaluating the accuracy of perceptions of the current reality and by building a business case for people in the organisation.

Training and development programmes must facilitate relearning and re-envisioning (Treen, 2000) and should be designed to assist employees in the competency of “unlearning” irrelevant skills and knowledge and adapting to shorter cycle times to facilitate fundamental and enduring change via real transformation (Ulrich, 1997). Bramson (2000) maintains that transformation and change processes are likely to fail if the “human ingredient” is ignored.

A third competency demanded from human resource practitioners is that they should be capable of developing human resources processes that will facilitate sourcing and retention of competence and intellectual property (Childre et al., 2000) to sustain competitive advantage (Lawler & Finegold, 2000). The importance of functional and administrative expertise that enable meaningfulness and alignment of people processes have developed into an important component of human resource practitioner competence (Gratton, 2000).

Globalisation and technological development are also highly relevant for South African organisations. It is also expected of human resource professionals to align human resource strategies with business strategies (Struwig, Smith, & Venter, 2003) by focussing human resource activities on customer needs and the value chain. As in the global environment, human resource performance indicators in South Africa should be based on the creation of economic value (De Waal, 2001) to enable organisational competitiveness. South African human resource practitioners also need to be competent to adapt to change (Struwig et al., 2003) and develop competencies to facilitate and support transformational change (Anderson & Anderson, 2001).

South African human resource practitioners further need to be able to demonstrate respect for people and should be seen as fair (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003), decisive and honest whenever people decisions, e.g. transformation, retrenchment and employment equity, are necessary. Human resource departments have an important role to play in the integration of management ethics with human resource practices in South Africa (Van Zyl, 2002). The continuous alignment of human resource strategies, activities, processes and competencies within an ever-changing business environment, as described in the previous paragraphs, poses certain problems for the human resource profession in the South African petrochemical industry. It means that specific skills, knowledge and attributes that are essential to successfully support business strategy today, might be redundant tomorrow.

Modern business managers have also realised the necessity of work wellness initiatives and that a relationship exists between work wellness of employees (measured in terms of burnout, work engagement and workaholism) and business results, but very few companies measure whether such initiatives actually has had any impact on work performance (Hacker & Doolan, 2002).

Defining performance indicators and competence models for human resource practitioners has developed into a dynamic activity that has the potential of creating a sense of incompetence, exhaustion, decreased motivation and dysfunctional work attitudes, collectively defined as burnout (Schaufeli, 2004). This highlights the need to identify and research psychological constructs that hold predictable value for the ability of human resource practitioners to prevent and overcome burnout by generating sufficient emotional energy to adapt to changing business needs, acquiring strategic human resource competencies to increase their feelings of professional efficacy and to increase their enthusiasm about their work.

Schaufeli (2004) defines work engagement as "... a positive, affective-emotional state that is characterized by Vigour, Dedication and Absorption" (p. 22), considered by some authors to be the direct opposite state of burnout (Rothmann, 2003) that fosters job performance. The UWES database of the Dutch language version (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) contains no data in respect of human resource practitioners or of workers in a chemical industry. This supports the comments of Rothmann and Storm (2003) on the need for research on the conceptualisation and measurement of engagement as an opposite state of burnout in other occupations to provide engagement level norms. Rothmann and Storm (2003) also emphasise that many unanswered questions regarding burnout and stress still exist in the multicultural South African society and suggest more attention to a fortigenic approach (Strumpfer, 2004; Tytherleigh, 2003) in this regard. Hence, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) is considered a more appropriate instrument for this research than the opposite MBI profile (Rothmann, 2003).

Therefore, the problem statement for this research is summarised as follows: What is the influence of burnout, work engagement and workaholism levels of human resource practitioners on their perceived level of competence or performance in a South African petrochemical industry? Competence and performance in terms of this research are described

as perceived importance of human resource practitioner roles, i.e. Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support and Change Management, as well as perceptions of current performance in terms of these roles.

The general problem statement is divided into four specific research questions:

- Do managers in a South African petrochemical company, as suggested by recent literature, also perceive the human resource roles and competencies as important business enablers? This question attempts to determine whether the human resource roles described in recent literature are perceived to be relevant job demands for the South African petrochemical industry.
- Do managers in a South African petrochemical industry perceive the level of current performance of their human resource practitioners to be in line with the expectations of the organisations they work in?
- What is the current relationship between human resource practitioners' levels of burnout, work engagement and the perceived level of their performance in respect of business enabling human resource competencies?
- What is the relationship between workaholism factors, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners?

This study will make the following contributions to Industrial Psychology as a science: Firstly, it will test the validity of factor structures of the Ulrich Role Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997) as well as a workaholism scale, extracted from the Schedule for Non-adaptive and Adaptive Personality Workaholism (SNAP-Work), the Workaholism Battery (WorkBAT), and the WART (Work Addiction Risk Test) (McMillan et al., 2002), as international measuring instruments for utilisation in the South African petrochemical industry. Secondly, it will contribute to knowledge about the validity of identified human resource roles as valid measures of value-adding human resource practitioner performance. Thirdly, scientific information regarding performance and wellness of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical organisation will be made available. It will also

evaluate the predictable value of wellness instruments for utilisation during recruitment, selection and wellness interventions. Results of this study will contribute to the existing database of wellness information.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives consist of a general objective and specific objectives.

1.2.1 General objective

The general objective of this study is to determine whether work wellness indicators (burnout, engagement and workaholism) can be used as predictors of perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in a South African petrochemical organisation.

1.2.2 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To conceptualise human resource practitioner competence from existing literature and to identify those human resource competencies and roles that managers in the South African petrochemical industry perceive to be necessary to enable human resource practitioners to support business strategies.
- To investigate the relationship between levels of work engagement of human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry, and their level of performance as perceived by business managers.
- To assess the relationship between burnout of human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry and their level of performance as perceived by business managers.
- To determine the relationship between workaholism factors, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners.

1.3 RESEARCH METHOD

1.3.1 Literature review

The theories, stances and existing models relevant to the following constructs are described from existing literature:

- Human resource practitioner job demands (roles, competence and performance levels) (Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Bramson, 2000; Childre et al., 2000; De Waal, 2002; Gratton, 2000; Lawler & Finegold, 2000; Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003; Treen, 2000; Ulrich, 1997; Van Zyl, 2002; Vermeulen, 2003), with special reference to models that combine willingness (Cynicism versus Dedication) and capability (Exhaustion versus Vigour) (Rothmann, 2003).
- Psychofortology (Strumpfer, 2004) and positive psychology (Schaufeli, 2004).
- Work wellness, with specific reference to emotional Exhaustion and Cynicism as subscales of burnout (Rothmann, 2003; Rothmann & Storm, 2003; Schaufeli, 2004).
- Work engagement, with specific reference to Vigour and Dedication (Rothmann, 2003; Schaufeli, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003).
- Workaholism as a construct that influences work wellness and performance of human resource practitioners. (Burke, Burgess, & Fallon, 2006; Burke & Mathiessen, 2004).

1.3.2 Research design

The aim of the research is to structure the exploratory and descriptive research in such a way that it indicates the relationships between variables (Mouton & Marais, 1990). A survey design is used to achieve the research objectives. The survey design has the advantages of obtaining a large amount of information from a large population. It is economical and the research information that can, within sampling error, be regarded as accurate. This type of design holds the disadvantage of being time and energy consuming (Kerlinger, 1986).

1.3.3 Participants

The study was conducted in a petrochemical company (25 400 employees) that is operating in South Africa as well as in a number of other countries in Africa, Europe and the United States. This research targets those employees who are regarded as being in the best position to provide information on current and expected strategic human resource-related competencies, performance and work experiences.

The sample selected for this research includes all 709 human resource generalists, managers and specialists in this organisation as well as the most senior functional managers to whom they are rendering a human resource service. Secretarial human resource staff is excluded, and only those administrative staff that are currently managing human resource administration functions are included in the sample. A total of 1 418 questionnaires were distributed and 195 usable completed questionnaires were returned. A total of 128 responses from human resource personnel and 67 from functional line managers were received. This represents a response ratio of 18,1 % from human resource practitioners.

1.3.4 Measuring battery

The *Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (HRRAS)* was developed by Ulrich (1997) to explore the roles human resource practitioners are playing in organisations. Roles are presented in the form of statements, e.g. human resources help the organisation to achieve business goals, human resource participate in delivering human resource processes, etc. Items are scored on a five-point frequency rating scale that indicates to what extent the respondent agrees with the statement, varying from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). For purposes of this study, the instrument was adapted to include a rating of the level of importance of each subscale (Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support, and Change Management) in the questionnaire. The revised instrument is utilised to measure the perceived business, enabling value of human resource practitioners' competencies or roles as well as the perceived quality of performance of human resource practitioners on each subscale (including Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support, and Change Management). Cronbach alpha coefficients reported in this study varied between 0,89 (Perceived Importance of human resources' responsibility to provide administrative support) and 0,96 (Perceived level of human resources' performance as change agents).

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey* (MBI-GS) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997) has three subscales that provide a three dimensional perspective of burnout, namely Exhaustion, Cynicism and low Professional Efficacy (Schaufeli, 2003). Exhaustion consists of five items, e.g. "I feel emotionally drained from my work". Cynicism also consists of five items, e.g. "I have become less interested in my work since I started this job" and Professional Efficacy consists of six items, e.g. "I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my work". Items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). Cronbach alphas of 0,87 (Exhaustion), 0,73 (Cynicism) and 0,67 (Professional Efficacy) indicated internal consistency. Wiese, Rothmann and Storm (2003) found similar internal consistencies (0,69–0,92). According to Rothmann (2003), satisfactory alpha coefficients have also been found for this instrument in South African studies (Exhaustion = 0,79 and Cynicism = 0,84). According to Schaufeli (2003), the MBI has good technical and psychometric properties, but validity is questioned, since it does not comprehensively measure burnout-related symptoms such as cognitive impairment and distress. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) reported that internal consistency and factor and construct validity of foreign language versions (German, Dutch, & French) are similar to the American version of the MBI, although different burnout results were found in different countries. Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that the weighting of domains of work environments differ, which makes it necessary to consider the context during burnout research.

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* has three subscales that provide a three dimensional perspective of work engagement, namely Vigour, Dedication and Absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigour is assessed by five items that refer to energy and resilience levels, willingness to invest effort in work and cope with fatigue, e.g. "I am bursting with energy in my work". Dedication consists of five items that refer to work enthusiasm and significance, e.g. "I am very resilient, mentally, in my job" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Absorption is measured by six items measuring the respondent's involvement and attachment to his work, e.g. "I am immersed in my work". Items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). Cronbach alphas of 0,83 (*Vigour*) and 0,92 (*Dedication*) and 0,82 (*Absorption*) indicated internal consistency.

A number of different instruments are used in workaholism studies to measure workaholism. According to McMillan et al. (2002), the WorkBAT (Workaholism battery) has acceptable face validity and internal consistency but its internal structure and construct validity is

questioned (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004). The WorkBAT is a self-report questionnaire with 25 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale that measures work involvement, drive and enjoyment (related to job satisfaction). It is considered one of the few validated workaholism measures (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004). The Schedule for Non-adaptive and Adaptive Personality Workaholism (SNAP-Work) is suggested as an alternative workaholism measure by McMillan et al. (2002). It is a forced choice (true/false) instrument with 18 items, including an Obsessive/Compulsive scale. The abridged version of the WART (Work Addiction Risk Test) (McMillan et al., 2002) is the oldest workaholism measurement instrument according to Ersoy-Kart (2005). Beulens and Poelmans (2004) identify different dimensions to discriminate between workaholics and non-workaholics, i.e. compulsion (which is closely related to the drive dimension of the WorkBAT), control, impaired communication or self-absorption, inability to delegate and self-worth. According to Flowers and Robinson (2002), only the first three are considered workaholism dimensions. The WART uses a four-point Likert scale, with a total score between 25 and 100. Flowers and Robinson (2002) as well as Taris, Schaufeli, and Verhoefen (2005) found that the compulsive tendencies subscale (8 items) of the WART rendered the same results as the full WART instrument, implying that this abridged version instead of the full WART can be used to measure workaholism. Ersoy-Kart (2005) warns that different survey items might be needed for different populations. Twenty questions are selected from these workaholism instruments to form a Workaholism Scale for measurement of workaholism for purposes of this study.

1.3.5 Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis is carried out with SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2003). Cronbach alpha coefficients and inter-item correlations are used to assess the internal consistency of measuring instruments. Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics are used to analyse the data. In Article 1, the factorial model of the Ulrich Role Assessment Survey (HRRAS) is firstly investigated through confirmatory factor analysis. Principal component analysis is performed on 40 items of the HRRAS for a sample of 128 human resource practitioner responses. Independent t-tests (two-tailed) are used to determine whether differences exist between perceptions of human resource practitioners and their customers regarding the importance and current quality of human resource performance on each of the subscales. In Article 2, step-wise regression analysis is used to determine to what extent perceived performance levels are predicted by

Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication. In Article 3, principal factor extraction with oblimin rotation will be performed through SAS FACTOR on 20 items selected for the Workaholism Scale. Step-wise regression analysis will once again be used to determine to what extent perceived performance levels and burnout are explained by workaholism factors.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 deals with perceived importance as well as perceived current performance of the human resource roles suggested by Ulrich (1997). Chapter 3 investigates the impact of burnout and engagement on perceived levels of performance. Chapter 4 focuses on the influence of workaholism on burnout and human resource practitioner performance. Discussions and recommendations are summarised in Chapter 5.

1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the background to the problem underlying the study, outlined the research objectives and the significance of the study, defined the relevant concepts, and discussed the research methodology. This will serve as the background for the presentation of the material and evidence presented in the remainder of this study.

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CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE 1

PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS IN A GLOBAL PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to compare the perceptions of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company concerning expected and virtual contributions to business performance to those of their internal clients. Stratified samples were taken of human resource personnel ($N = 128$) and their internal line customers ($N = 67$). The Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey was administered to compare the perceptions of human resource practitioners with those of their internal customers. The factorial structure and internal consistency of the measuring instrument were confirmed by means of confirmatory factor analysis. It was found that human resource practitioners and their line customers are in agreement concerning the importance of the human resources roles that enable business performance, indicating that human resource practitioners have a good understanding of their job requirements. Both human resource practitioners and their line customers perceive the performance of human resource practitioners as average, which is lower than the expected level of performance as indicated by importance scales.

OPSOMMING

Die doelstelling van hierdie studie was om die mensehulpbron-personeel in 'n internasionale petrochemiese maatskappy se persepsies rakende verwagte en wesenlike bydraes tot besigheidsprestasie met dié van hul interne kliënte te vergelyk. Gestratifiseerde steekproewe is getrek van mensehulpbron-personeel ($N = 128$) en hul interne kliënte ($N = 67$). Die Ulrich Mense Hulpbron Rolevaluering Opname is gebruik om die persepsies van mensehulpbron-personeel met dié van hul interne kliënte te vergelyk. Die faktorstruktuur en interne konsekwentheid van die meetinstrument is aan die hand van bevestigende faktoranalise gestaaf. Daar is gevind dat mensehulpbron-personeel en hul kliënte saamstem oor die belangrikheid van die rolle wat mensehulpbron-personeel ten opsigte van besigheidsprestasie, wat aandui dat hulle 'n goeie begrip het van hul werksvereistes. Beide mensehulpbron-personeel en hul kliënte ervaar die huidige prestasievlak van mensehulpbron-personeel as gemiddeld, wat laer is as die verwagte prestasievlak, soos aangedui deur persepsies van die belangrikheid van mensehulpbron-rolle.

The human resource function fulfils an important role in contributing to business performance. According to Ulrich (1997), globalisation and the influence of technological development on time and communication, new competitive challenges and fast changing corporate cultures have changed the agenda for human resource professionals from a primarily transactional to a value adding approach. Business managers need to be able to manage performance of employees from different national backgrounds and within fast changing corporate cultures (Addison, 2003). This has changed the competencies and roles organisations expect human resource practitioners to fulfil (Othman, Abdul-Ghani, & Arshad, 2001). The ability of human resource practitioners to adapt to changing environments has become particularly important. Panayotopoulou and Papalexandris (2004) argue that changes in modern corporate environments have shifted the human resource emphasis from a “management practices” orientation to a “management deliverables” orientation. According to this view, the focus has shifted to organisational growth, organisational outcomes and business performance by firstly identifying the relevant and important human resource activities, and secondly by finding evidence of its contribution towards individual and company performance to provide a competitive advantage. The need has developed for human resource practitioners to contribute to the resolution of real business issues by being focussed on the business value chain, profitability through increased revenue and decreased costs, organisational capability, change readiness and intellectual capital attraction and retention.

The value adding contribution of the human resources departments in the organisation where this study was done has also been under the spotlight for a number of years. The business is expanding continuously both in South Africa and globally and discussions with business managers create the impression that human resource practitioners are not adding value according to expectations. It appears that every business manager has a different view on what the primary role of human resource practitioners should be. It also became evident that business managers expect a higher level of performance from human resource practitioners than what is currently delivered. Discussions with human resource practitioners confirmed this point of view. This situation raises a concern in terms of the work wellness of human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry, which is supported by high utilisation of employee assistance programs by human resource personnel.

Based on the above-mentioned description of the research problem, the question arises as to what the perceived level of competence / performance of human resource practitioners in a South African petrochemical industry is. More specifically, it was attempted to determine whether the human resource competencies, as suggested by recent literature, are also perceived as important business enablers by line managers and human resource practitioners in a South African petrochemical company. Furthermore, the question arises as to whether managers and human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry currently perceive their human resource practitioners as sufficiently competent in respect of these business enabling human resources roles. Ulrich (1997) divided the contribution of the human resource function into four important roles, which suggests that strategic partnering skills as well as expertise in human resource processes and administrative activities, employee support, and transformation and change processes will enable human resource practitioners to add value to and to deliver results in the modern global business environment. Because of the limited utilisation of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997), it is also necessary to confirm the factor structure and internal consistency of this instrument for purposes of this research.

The objective of this study was to compare the perceptions of expected and actual contributions of human resource practitioners to business performance in a global petrochemical company.

Roles of the human resource function

According to Ulrich (1997), the human resource function has four roles, namely Strategic Partnering, Transactional Support, Employee Support, and Change Management.

Strategic partnering. Changing work environments and corporate cultures are forcing human resource practitioners and line managers to work together to support business strategies, emphasising the need for a different set of organisational enabling competencies for human resource practitioners (Treen, 2000; Ulrich, 1997). The human resource role has evolved from administrative and transactional activities to manufacturing, to services and lately to information with increased emphasis on knowledge workers whose value to the organisation can be expressed in financial terms, as they are responsible for putting company values into practice and achieving organisational strategy (Beatty, Huselid, & Schneier, 2003). It is

evident that line customers expect a movement from the traditional focus on recruitment, training, appraising and rewarding towards a business partnering role where human resource practitioners and operation managers are equally responsible for business results and competitiveness (Ulrich, 1997).

Gratton (2000) suggested that human resource practitioners must also be able to evaluate the accuracy of perceptions of the current reality and build a business case for people in the organisation. Worsfold (1999) refers to distinctive people management models that are focused on integration of human resource policies as well as on integration of human resource and business strategies as “strong” human resource models. Such models have a soft component (focussing on interventions to improve commitment and development) as well as a hard component that is focused on optimal utilisation of people (productivity improvement). Modern human resource practitioners should contribute to the business value chain as both individual employees and consultants, influencing the performance and commitment of employees. The involvement of human resource practitioners in budgets and mainstream decision making also indicates a trend to integrate human resource- and business strategies (Worsfold, 1999).

Human resource practitioners tend to aspire to work closely with business managers to achieve business goals, occasionally without a proper understanding of what the term “strategic partnering” actually means (King, 2002). However, changing the priorities of line managers implies that human resource practitioners have to change what they do as well as how they are perceived to influence the mindset, competencies and behaviour of employees if it wishes to be seen as a strategic business partner. It is therefore accepted for purposes of this research that strategic partnering is an important component of human resource practitioner performance.

Transactional support and human resource process expertise. The importance of meaningfulness and alignment of people processes is still a significant component of human resource practitioner competence (Gratton, 2000). *People processes* in this context refers to processes in the traditional human resource value chain, i.e. recruitment, selection, placement, remuneration and benefits, training and development, employee relations and termination of the employment agreement. Human resource practitioners are expected to develop recruitment and selection strategies that will source and retain competence and

intellectual property (Childre, Cryer, & Cooper, 2000) to sustain competitive advantage (Lawler & Finegold, 2000). Human resources departments are also expected to develop remuneration and training systems that reinforce the organisation's value systems. Treen (2000) supports this view in arguing that human resource practitioners have an ideal vantage point that makes it possible to support CEOs in strategy execution. It is often expected of human resource practitioners to develop and align processes, skills and competencies to facilitate the realisation of long-term business strategies. Haynes and Freyer (2000) refer to studies done in the mid and late 1990's, indicating positive relationships between human resource management practices and organisational performance which suggest that competence and commitment can be increased by effective training-, communication-empowerment- and performance management systems. However, very few useful theories have resulted from such studies. It might be a more important challenge for human resource practitioners to find methods to increase and maintain employee commitment (Foote & Robinson, 1999; Swailes, 2004). It seems that modern human resource practitioners tend to overemphasize their strategic partnering role and that they occasionally neglect the administrative and process support necessary to support strategy execution.

Employee support. Human resource practitioners often support the philosophy of "people business is line business", suggesting that line management at least needs to be involved in all human resource management practices to ensure business performance (Vermeulen, 2003). Human resource practitioners need to demonstrate respect for people and should be seen as fair (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003), decisive and honest whenever people decisions, e.g. transformation, retrenchment and employment equity are necessary. The human resources department also has an important role to play in the integration of management ethics with human resource practices in South Africa (Van Zyl, 2002).

Many organisations have started employee assistance programmes (EAPs) with the view to address work wellness issues, but with different levels of success. Negative feedback in respect of EAPs is mostly related to negotiation with and inability of outsourced service providers to report promptly on wellness trends in the organisation. This raises a question regarding sourcing of EAPs via internal human resource practitioners or from external consultants. Research indicates that it is appropriate for companies with less than 200 employees to outsource their EAPs, but that confidentiality and other issues make it more attractive for larger organisations to provide such a service via internal human resource

functions (Gammie, 1997). However, companies often outsource such programmes because internal human resource practitioners do not seem to have the competence or ability to provide the required employee support. The fact that employee wellness and employee assistance programmes are behaviourally based implies in terms of this research that human resource practitioners can influence the prosperity of the organisation by providing effective personal support to employees. Cost savings through prevention of incidents, absenteeism and litigations seem to bring the biggest benefits to organisations in this regard.

Change management. According to research done by the American Management Association, 84% percent of American companies were busy with and/or planning major change processes in the near future at the beginning of the millennium (Weber & Weber, 2001). Change has become the norm, and training and development programmes must facilitate relearning and re-envisioning (Treen, 2000) and should be designed to assist employees in “unlearning” redundant skills and knowledge and in adapting to shorter cycle times to facilitate fundamental and enduring change through real transformation (Ulrich, 1997). It has become necessary to manage organisational change as a continuous and dynamic process (Ashton, 1996). According to Bramson (2000), transformation and change processes will most probably fail if the “human ingredient” is ignored.

Perceptions of human resource contribution and priorities

Critical performance indicators and competency models for human resources departments are no longer determined independently by human resource directors, but by business managers who have a proper understanding of human behaviour (Fulmer, 2002). This is probably the reason why some successful companies are appointing successful general managers in human resource management positions. Becker, Huselid, and Ulrich (2001) stated that business managers are sceptical about the ability of human resource practitioners to influence the bottom line success of the organisation, mostly because the contributions of human resources departments to the bottom line are difficult to measure. The movement from an employee support focus to a business management focus has occasionally resulted in sidelining ethical issues, which had an influence on the credibility of the human resource function (Foote & Robinson, 1999). King reported that change management support from the human resources department is seen as even more important than strategic partnering (King, 2002). Modern business managers have also realised the necessity of employee health and wellness

initiatives and that a relationship exists between employee health and wellness and business results. However, very few companies measure whether such initiatives actually have any impact on work performance (Hacker & Doolan, 2002).

In contrast with some theories, King (2002) believes that there is still a high expectation from business managers that human resource practitioners have to focus primarily on transactional and administrative support and other traditional human resource processes such as recruitment and selection rather than on strategic business partnering.

Influence of human resource practices on organisational effectiveness

A limited number of studies that describe human resource practitioners' perception of their actual contribution to business success could be traced. Alcker and McHugh (2000, p.316) concluded that human resource practitioners might feel that, although they "should be driven by issues of strategic, financial and quality control, they are in effect still wedded to residual roles that involve welfare/counselling". According to Vermeulen (2003), few studies have investigated whether the human resource function has indeed made the transition to fulfil the roles that the changes of the 21st century require. Othman et al. (2001) reported that only 10% to 35% human resource managers have the ability and competencies that are needed to create a business focussed approach in human resource activities.

Literature shows contradictory results in terms of the influence of human resource practices on organisational effectiveness (Beatty et al., 2003; Christensen Hughes, 2002; Richard & Brown Johnson, 2001). Over the past 25 years, the primary focus of human resource functions has shifted from an employee welfare focus to a business management focus, which has resulted in increased ambiguity in the role of human resource practitioners (Foote & Robinson, 1999). Companies seem to be equally committed to quality, but different levels of commitment to human resource management are evident (Worsfold, 1999). Buyens and De Vos (2001) used the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey to conduct research in Belgium to determine whether non-human-resource functions and senior executives support the importance of the human resources department's role as strategic business partner (Ulrich, 1997). It was found that, although the human resource fraternity aspires to become a strategic business partner, business functions and senior executives occasionally still hold a traditional view that emphasises the people management role of human resource practitioners

as custodian of recruitment, learning and development and remuneration activities (Christensen Hughes, 2002), and that there is a stronger need in organisations for human resource practitioners to focus on enabling transformation and change and administrative support. Such findings are in contradiction with the view of Wright, Geroy, and MacPhee (2000), namely that human resource practitioners direct behaviour to the accomplishment of the organisation's mission and goals, and that human resources departments play a critical role in global strategy. It seems that some top managers expect human resources departments to play some strategic role in the business, but that they do not consider it necessary to involve human resource practitioners in strategy development (Buyens & De Vos, 2001; Othman et al., 2001).

Some proof was found that human resource practices influence employee behaviour, which has an effect on organisational effectiveness and providing a competitive advantage. This implies a direct relationship between human resource practitioner effectiveness and organisational level outcomes, as indicated, for example, in the research of Aycan (2001) who believes that human resource management has been instrumental in the competitiveness of Turkish companies since 1986, especially in companies where every employee is considered to be a strategic partner and is treated as such. Bramson (2000) views the assessment of human capital during mergers and acquisitions as an asset that is not found in any balance sheet. According to this view, human resource practitioners can help to prevent critically important employees from leaving when mergers are announced. Human resource practitioners also play a crucial role in the merger / acquisition decision through the evaluation of culture compatibility and culture alignment (Horwitz et al., 2002). Research by Haynes and Fryer (2000) indicates that human resource management practices can increase customer satisfaction and financial performance. However, studies such as those of Worsfold (1999) have found little proof that human resource practices have an influence on financial performance, productivity or product quality. Panayotopoulou and Papalexandris (2004) showed that human resource management has a more significant effect on organisational growth and innovation than on the financial performance of companies. From this, it can be concluded that objective measures of human resource practitioner performance are not reliable, mostly because of methodological weaknesses and response bias. However, strong relationships were found between employee perceptions of human resource practices and customer satisfaction, indicating that human resource practices have a direct effect on service cultures (Worsfold, 1999).

A variety of human resource management models are suggested in current literature (Panayotopoulou & Papalexandris, 2004). Human relations models emphasize concern for people as an indicator of successful human resource management models, whereas open systems models define success as flexibility and change readiness. These two models have been linked positively to performance. Predictability and process efficiency indicates success in open systems models as a third option whereas rational goal models focus on real business results. However, very few guidelines could be found on how to decide on a human resource management model that will facilitate business success during specific life cycles in organisations.

The ambiguity and contradictory findings that are referred to in these studies have certain important implications for this research. It emphasizes the need for empirical research to determine the relationship between the roles of the human resource function and performance (Christensen Hughes, 2002). It also indicates that perceptions play an important role in the evaluation of human resource practitioner performance. According to Alcker and McHugh (2000), such contradictions also indicate a need to verify the validity and reliability of the HRRAS (Ulrich, 1997) as an instrument to measure human resource practitioner performance.

Implications for human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry

Human resource functions in modern global organisations are expected to adapt human resource strategies and practices according to the life cycle stage the organisation is in, i.e. formation, growth, maturity or decline (Christensen Hughes, 2002). This requires human resource practitioners to have strategic business skills to be able to contextualise the stage the business is in before deciding on a human resource strategy, as well as a continuous process of learning new and unlearning old human resource methods and philosophies. According to Beatty, Huselid, and Schneier (2003), human resource practitioners continuously need to measure their current performance in terms of what is needed to achieve business goals and then to decide on how to change their focus to make the company more successful. This implies constant measurement and adaptation of human resource focus and priorities to correlate with the phases in the organisation's life cycle and the strategic shifts that it necessitates. It also means that one must be careful when benchmarking human resource

activities with other organisations. If human resource practitioners do not realise when such organisations are in different life cycle stages, it might lead to irrelevant human resource focus and activities. In diverse companies, it might even be necessary to consider different human resource focus and strategies for different business units.

The researcher believes that South African organisations are facing a phase of transition and instability similar to that of many other global organisations, which probably makes it difficult for employers in South Africa to integrate human resource issues with business strategy. This means that South African human resource practitioners are also expected to be able to adapt to change (Struwig, Smith, & Venter, 2003) and to develop competencies to facilitate and support transformational change (Anderson & Anderson, 2001).

The ability of South African organisations to compete in a global market is negatively affected by a “brain drain” of highly skilled people through emigration, internal migration, murder and HIV and related illnesses. The skilled workforce in South Africa is further eroded by an influx of unskilled people according to Du Preez (2002). Strategic long-term people planning and talent management is necessary to maintain the ability of South African organisations to attract and retain competent and committed people to ensure business continuity and competitiveness. Employers in South Africa need human resource practitioners who have the ability to integrate human resource practices and business strategies to overcome such threats.

Empirical support exists that suggests a positive relationship between superior financial performance and participative work systems that are focussed on high employee performance and commitment in petrochemical companies where human resource strategies are aimed at improving employee commitment and trust (Christensen Hughes, 2002). However, Birken (2005) warns South African businesses against “one-size-fits-all-management” fads, which he considers to be a marketing stunt from consultants who do not know or appreciate the organisation’s actual needs, style and culture. Such interventions are almost always focussed on a particular dimension in the organisation and do not take the entire organisation into consideration. According to this view, internal human resource consultants should be more effective than external consultants to assist line management to address strategic issues.

It must also be kept in mind that the South African labour market is governed by a set of complicated and integrated legislation, which requires human resource practitioners to continuously interpret and advise line managers on people practices and people strategies (Vermeulen, 2003).

Gammie (1997) has highlighted the positive effect of employee wellness programmes on organisation performance by reducing stress and improving general employee wellness and performance in the oil and gas industry. Gammie (1997) points out that although statistics occasionally do not support employee claims concerning the negative impact of work factors (e.g. number of divorce cases), perceptions of such negative impacts are obvious stressors that influence employee wellness, safety and quality of performance. Human resources departments have an important role to play in the unique petrochemical work environment to explain to management the apparent contradiction between such statistics and employee wellness.

The literature reviewed for purposes of this study indicates support for the human resources roles suggested by Ulrich (1997). However, some concerning trends are evident: Firstly, there is a huge amount of pressure on human resource practitioners to deliver a variety of specialised human resource services to contribute to business success in modern organisations. However, there seems to be contradictory views on the priority of the different human resources roles. This might indicate excessive and uncertain job demands that will most probably cause distress (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006) for human resource practitioners, which will make it difficult for them to perform according to the expectations of their customers. This could have a negative impact on the wellness of human resource practitioners.

METHOD

Research design

This study was exploratory and descriptive (Mouton & Marais, 1990). A cross-sectional survey was used to investigate demonstrable relationships between dependent and independent variables at a specific point in time.

Participants

The study was conducted in a petrochemical company (25 400 employees) that is operating in South Africa as well as in a number of other countries in Africa, Europe and the United States. This research targets those employees who are considered to be in the best position to provide information on current and expected strategic human resource related competencies, performance and work experiences.

The sample selected for this research includes all 709 human resource generalists, managers and specialists in this organisation as well as the most senior functional managers to whom they are rendering a human resource service. Secretarial human resource staff is excluded and only those administrative staff who are currently managing human resource administration functions are included in the sample. A total of 1 418 questionnaires were distributed and 195 usable completed questionnaires were returned. A total of 128 responses from human resource personnel and 67 from functional line managers were received. This represents a response ratio of 13,8%.

Characteristics of the participants are indicated in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (Human Resource Practitioners)

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Younger than 36 Years	26	20,3
	36 – 40 Years	20	15,6
	41 – 45 Years	25	19,5
	46 – 50 Years	33	25,8
	Older than 50 Years	24	18,8
Gender	Male	75	58,6
	Female	53	41,4
Marital status	Single	7	5,5
	Married	107	83,6
	Separated/Divorced/Widower	14	10,9
Years with current employer	Less than 5 Years	21	16,4
	5 – 9 Years	29	22,7
	10 – 14 Years	20	15,6
	15 – 19 Years	20	15,6
	20 – 24 Years	18	14,1
	More than 24 years	20	15,6
Current position	Non-managerial	30	23,4
	First-line supervision	51	39,8
	Middle Management	32	25,0
	Senior Management	13	10,2
	Top Management	2	1,6
Years on current job level	Less than one Year	15	11,7
	1 – 2 Years	41	32,0
	3 – 4 Years	35	27,4
	5 – 6 Years	15	11,7
	Longer than 6 Years	22	17,2
Qualifications	Grade 12 or lower	24	18,8
	1 – 2 year diploma	12	9,4
	3 year diploma / degree	51	39,8
	Post-graduate	41	32,0

Most of the human resource participants are married (83,6%) and have been employed in this specific organisation for more than ten years (60,9%). This might explain the relatively high number of human resource practitioners who are older than 36 years (60,9%). Only 28,9 percent of the human resource practitioners who participated in the research have been on their current job level for longer than five years. It can therefore be accepted that human resource practitioners in this organisation are frequently promoted and that sufficient career opportunities are available to prevent frustration with career progress. Only 23,4% of the human resource practitioners who responded are not at supervisory or management level. This supports the aim to target employees who are considered to be in the best position to

provide information on current and expected strategic human resource related competencies, performance and work experiences.

Table 2 indicates that only 14,9 percent of the functional line managers who responded are not in at least first-line management positions. This indicates that the survey was successful in targeting the more senior internal line customers to whom human resource practitioners in this organisation are rendering a human resource service.

Table 2

Line Customers' Job Levels

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Job levels of Functional managers	Non-managerial	10	14,9
	First-line supervision	7	10,4
	Middle Management	18	26,9
	Senior Management	24	35,9
	Top Management	8	11,9

Measuring instrument

The *Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (HRRAS)* was developed by Ulrich (1997) to explore the roles human resource practitioners are playing in organisations. Roles are presented in the form of statements, e.g. human resources help the organisation achieve business goals, human resources participate in delivering human resource processes, etc. Items are scored on a five-point frequency rating scale that indicates to what extent the respondent agrees with the statement, varying from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). The instrument is adapted for purposes of this study to include a rating of the level of importance of each subscale (Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support, and Change Management) in the questionnaire. The revised instrument is utilised to measure the perceived business enabling value of human resource practitioners' competencies/roles as well as the perceived quality of performance of human resource practitioners on each subscale (including Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support, and Change Management). Cronbach alpha coefficients reported in this study varied between 0,89 (Perceived importance of human resources' responsibility to provide administrative support) and 0,96 (Perceived level of human resources' performance as change agents).

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2003). During the literature review that was conducted for this research, only one previous study could be traced in which the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey was utilised (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). The factorial model of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (HRRAS) was therefore firstly investigated through confirmatory factor analysis. Principal component analysis was performed on 40 items of the HRRAS for a sample of 128 human resource practitioner responses. Cronbach alpha coefficients were used to assess the internal consistency of the HRRAS.

Secondly, descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Independent t-tests (two-tailed) were used to determine whether differences exist between perceptions of human resource practitioners and their customers regarding the importance and current quality of human resource performance on each of the subscales.

RESULTS

The four subscales of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (HRRAS) were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey

Factor	% Variance explained	α
Factor 1: Strategic Partnering	54,15	0,90
Factor 2: Administrative Expertise	50,84	0,89
Factor 3: Employee Support	63,43	0,93
Factor 4: Change Management	61,51	0,93

The results, as indicated in Table 3, confirm that the original factorial structure of the HRRAS can be retained. The proportion of variance accounted for by the factors, as

suggested by Ulrich (1997), varies between 50,84% (Administrative Expertise) and 63,43% (Employee Support).

Dependent *t*-test (two-tailed) results for human resource practitioner perceptions are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test Results for the Human Resource Group (N = 128)

Items	<i>Importance</i>		<i>Performance</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Strategic Partnering	4,52	0,51	3,39	0,69	16,35	0,00	1,63
Administrative Expertise	4,24	0,57	3,50	0,69	10,55	0,00	1,07
Employee Support	4,32	0,63	3,31	0,83	11,40	0,00	1,22
Change Management	4,49	0,57	3,28	0,82	14,80	0,00	1,47

Analysis of Table 4 reveals that human resource practitioners perceive their performance as strategic partners (Mean = 3,39; *SD* = 0,69) as significantly lower than their own perceived importance of this role (Mean = 4,52; *SD* = 0,51; *t* = 16,35; *p* (two-tailed) < 0,01). Similar significant and statistically meaningful results were found in terms of the difference between perceived performance as administrative experts (*t* = 10,55; *p* (two-tailed) < 0,01), employee “champions” (*t* = 11,40; *p* (two-tailed) < 0,01) and change managers (*t* = 14,80; *p* (two-tailed) < 0,01) and the perceived importance of these roles. Effect sizes are practically meaningful (large effect, *d* > 0,80).

Dependent *t*-test (two-tailed) results for line customer perceptions are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Paired Samples Statistics and t-Test Results for the Line Customers Group (N = 67)

Items	<i>Importance</i>		<i>Performance</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>D</i>
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Strategic Partnering	4,39	0,55	3,28	0,75	12,01	0,00	1,49
Administrative Expertise	4,01	0,61	3,37	0,70	5,61	0,00	0,92
Employee Support	4,15	0,61	3,28	0,84	7,44	0,00	1,04
Change Management	4,43	0,56	3,10	0,91	10,58	0,00	1,47

Analysis of Table 5 reveals that line customers perceive the performance of human resource practitioners as strategic partners (Mean = 3,28; *SD* = 0,75) as significantly lower than the perceived importance of this role (Mean = 4,39; *SD* = 0,55; $t = 12,01$; p (two-tailed) < 0,01). Similar significant and statistically meaningful results were found in terms of the difference between perceived performance on administrative expertise ($t = 5,61$; p (two-tailed) < 0,01), employee support, ($t = 7,44$; p (two-tailed) < 0,01) and change management ($t = 10,58$; p (two-tailed) < 0,01) and the perceived importance of these roles. Effect sizes are practically meaningful (large effect, $d > 0,80$).

Independent t -test (two-tailed) results for the perceptions of human resource practitioners and those of line customer are compared in Table 6. According to Table 6, statistically significant differences were found between the perceptions of human resource practitioners and those of their line customers in terms of the importance of the administrative expertise role. Human resource practitioners perceived this role as more important (Mean = 4,24; *SD* = 0,57) than did their line customers (Mean = 4,01; *SD* = 0,61; $t = 2,58$; $d = 0,38$).

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and t-Test Results for the Combined Group

Items	Human Resources (<i>N</i> = 128)		Line Customers (<i>N</i> = 67)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Strategic Partnering Importance	4,51	0,51	4,39	0,55	1,46	0,15	0,22
Administrative Expertise Importance	4,24	0,57	4,01	0,61	2,58	0,01*	0,38
Employee Support Importance	4,31	0,63	4,15	0,61	1,67	0,10	0,25
Change Management Importance	4,48	0,57	4,43	0,56	0,61	0,54	0,09
Strategic Partnering Performance	3,39	0,69	3,28	0,75	1,05	0,30	0,16
Administrative Expertise Performance	3,50	0,69	3,37	0,70	1,22	0,23	0,18
Employee Support Performance	3,31	0,83	3,28	0,84	0,19	0,85	0,03
Change Management Performance	3,28	0,82	3,10	0,91	1,42	0,16	0,20

* Statistically significant: $p < 0,05$

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was firstly to confirm the validity of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997) and secondly to determine the relationship between the perceptions of functional managers and those of human resource practitioners regarding the importance of human resources roles as well as the perceived business enabling contribution of human resource activities.

The results of this study confirmed that the original factorial structure of the HRRAS can be retained. It was also found that human resource practitioners perceive their performance as strategic partners as significantly lower than their own perceived importance of this role. Significant and statistically meaningful results were found in terms of the difference between

perceived performance as administrative experts, employee supporters and change agents and the perceived importance of these roles. The administrative expert role was rated as slightly more important by human resource practitioners than by their line customers

The factor validity of the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997) as an instrument to measure perceptions of the importance and current performance of human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry was confirmed by this research. Four factors were confirmed. The first factor represents the *Strategic Partnering role* of the human resources department, referring primarily to the participation of human resource practitioners in business strategy development and the positioning of the activities of the human resources department to facilitate strategy implementation. The second factor (*Administrative Support*) refers to the development, implementation and maintenance of functional human resource processes. The third factor, *Employee Support*, refers to the responsibility of human resource practitioners to ensure personal support and fairness in human resource processes. *Change Management*, the fourth factor, refers to the role of human resource practitioners to facilitate the ever-increasing change initiatives in the organisation.

This research also indicates consistent support for the importance of the human resources roles suggested by Ulrich (1997), although it was found that the four roles are perceived to be almost equally important, which contradicts the view of Ulrich (1997), namely that there is a shift from the traditional human resources roles to a strategic partnering role. Strategic partnering is perceived by human resource practitioners as well as line managers as most important, while administrative expertise is perceived as the least important human resource role by both these groups. These findings imply that strategic partnering, administrative support, employee support and change management can be viewed as critical performance areas and job requirements for human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical organisation where this study was performed. It also indicates support for the suggestions of Ulrich (1997) that personal development programs of human resource practitioners should be aimed at development of competence in terms of these roles to improve the ability of the human resources department to contribute to business success. Furthermore, it implies that these roles should form part of the selection criteria during recruitment, selection and promotion of human resource practitioners.

As strategic partners, human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical business need to align human resource strategies with overall business strategies and also provide human resource infrastructure and capacity to translate such strategies into supportive human resource processes and activities (Worsfold, 1999). It implies that human resource practitioners can use the strategic focus areas as stated in the overall business strategies to motivate and prioritise human resource projects and to evaluate the competence and capacity of the human resources department.

Modern human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry must also be careful not to overemphasize their strategic partnering role to the extent that they neglect the administrative and process support necessary to assist strategy execution. This study indicated that line customers still regard the traditional transactional human resources roles as relevant and valuable contributors to business success.

This research further confirmed other research findings (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003; Van Zyl, 2002), namely that human resource practitioners as well as their line customers believe that the human resources department can influence the prosperity of the organisation by providing effective personal support through employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs.

Human resource practitioners have to assist employees in developing skills and knowledge to cope with change and to facilitate fundamental transformation and enduring change (Ulrich, 1997). This research also indicates that the change management role of human resource practitioners can be regarded as the most important contribution of human resource practitioners to organisational performance.

Although the experience and academic qualifications of human resource practitioners in this organisation seem to be sufficient, both human resource practitioners and their line customers perceive the current performance of human resource practitioners in terms of all the human resources roles as average, which is significantly lower than the expected level of performance as indicated by importance scales. The largest performance gap seems to be in terms of the change management role. Human resource practitioners are perceived to be performing better as administrative experts than in the other roles.

The results of this study imply that human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry have sufficient ability and good theoretical understanding of the expected job demands to facilitate a valuable contribution to business success, but that they find it difficult to deliver at the level that they, as well as their line customers, believe is necessary. This study also indicated that the perceived performance gap is not caused by misaligned perceptions regarding the role human resource practitioners are supposed to fulfil in this organisation. This might be one cause of distress (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006), resulting in the current high utilisation of employee assistance programmes by human resource practitioners in this organisation.

A few limitations in this study need to be addressed. Firstly, further investigation of the participant characteristics that are regarded to be indicators of competence is necessary because it only considered characteristics that influence skills and knowledge. This study also excluded personal attributes as a third important dimension of competence, e.g. work attitudes identification with work, work dedication and self-confidence. The influence of work wellness indicators such as distress and exhaustion were also not investigated. There might also be other variables that could distort perception scores regarding current performance levels. This organisation uses forced ranking to ensure that performance ratings are normally distributed. Qualitative follow-up interviews with participants revealed a high level of discomfort with the forced ranking philosophy, which could have distorted responses. Another limitation relates to generalizability, since this study was conducted in one specific organisation only.

Despite these limitations, the perceived gap between expected and actual performance cannot be ignored. The fact that respondents agree that all the human resources roles should be fulfilled on an exceptional level provides evidence that human resource practitioners are expected to contribute to organisational effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The petrochemical industry can impact positively on its business performance in the global arena by improving the level of performance of human resource practitioners. Further research in this environment is necessary to investigate possible causes for the perceived performance gap. The mediating / moderating effect of commitment and willingness to

engage, development of personal resources and coping mechanisms as mediators / moderators of human resource practitioners to cope with the challenges the modern business environment poses on the human resource function should be investigated. The influence of constructs such as burnout, work engagement, locus of control, workaholism and life orientation can be included in such research. Future studies should also investigate distress and uestress levels in the human resource fraternity with specific attention to the effect it has on perceived performance levels. This can improve our understanding of the causes of wellness problems in human resources departments to enable the design of interventions to improve wellness of human resource practitioners.

The positive correlation between the perceptions of human resource practitioners and line customers regarding the importance of human resources roles probably indicates that job demands are not unrealistic and that interventions to reduce job demands might not be appropriate. It is therefore recommended that interventions to improve human resource practitioner wellness and performance as well as future research in this organisation should be designed to confirm the actual effect of job resources on human resource practitioner wellness, rather than that of job demands.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH ARTICLE 2

HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONER PERFORMANCE IN THE PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY: DOES WELLNESS ADD ANY VALUE?

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to determine whether burnout and engagement have an influence on the perceived value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company. Stratified samples ($N = 128$) were taken of human resource personnel and their internal line customers. The engagement / burnout levels as measured by means of the Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale were compared with perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners obtained from the Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997). It was found that cynicism has statistically meaningful predictable value in terms of the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation in terms of all the human resources roles, and that vigour and dedication also hold statistically meaningful predictable value for perceived performance on the transactional support role.

OPSOMMING

Die doelstelling van hierdie studie was om vas te stel of die waarde wat mensehulpbronpersoneel in 'n internasionale petrochemiese maatskappy toevoeg wel deur uitbranding en werksbegeestering beïnvloed word. Gestratifiseerde steekproewe ($N = 128$) is getrek van mensehulpbron-praktisyns en hul interne kliënte. Werkbegeestering en uitbranding, soos gemeet deur die Maslach Uitbranding Opname – Algemene Skaal en die Utrecht Werksbegeesteringskaal, is vergelyk met persepsies van mensehulpbron-praktisyns se prestasievlakke soos gemeet deur die Ulrich Mensehulpbron Rolevaluering Opname (Ulrich, 1997). Daar is gevind dat sinisme statisties betekenisvolle voorspellingswaarde inhou met betrekking tot die persepsie van prestasievlakke van mensehulpbron-praktisyns in die organisasie rakende al die mensehulpbron-rolle en dat energie en toewyding statisties betekenisvolle voorspellingswaarde inhou vir prestasie ten opsigte van die administratiewe rol.

The need of modern 21st century businesses to globalise as well as the influence of technological development on time, communication, competition and corporate cultures have changed the competencies and roles organisations expect of human resource practitioners (Othman, Abdul-Ghani, & Arshad, 2001), especially in terms of their ability to adapt to constant transformation and change (King, 2002). While the human resource function was traditionally expected to only play a transactional and supportive role regarding employees, the modern business manager expects his strategic human resource partners to contribute in visible and measurable ways towards business success (Gratton, 2000; Haynes & Fryer, 2000; King, 2002; Ulrich, 1997; Van Zyl, 2002). However, it seems that human resource practitioners are struggling to live up to these “new” challenges, primarily because of a lack of the ability and competence necessary to create a business focussed approach in human resource activities (Othman et al., 2001, Pieterse, 2007).

Many business managers are sceptical about the ability of human resource practitioners to influence the bottom line success of the organisation (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001), perhaps because the contributions of human resources departments to the bottom line are difficult to measure. Buyens and De Vos (2001) found that business managers expect human resources departments to fulfil a strategic role in the business, but that they rarely allow human resource practitioners to be involved in business strategy development. On the other hand, employees occasionally also lose confidence in the credibility of human resource practitioners because they believe ethical issues are being ignored in the focus shift of the human resource function towards a business management perspective (Foote & Robinson, 1999). These often contradictory expectations regarding the role of human resource practitioners in modern organisations might manifest in excessive and uncertain job demands that will most probably cause distress (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006), resulting in increased burnout and decreased work engagement levels, which could make it difficult for human resource practitioners to perform in accordance with the expectations of customers.

Research has shown that work engagement can have an impact on individual and organisational performance (Schaufeli, 2003). If a worker perceives his/her own contribution as unvalued, it can lead to higher cynicism, which inhibits performance if it becomes a habitual pattern (O’Brian et al., 2004). At an organisational level, low levels of work engagement can lead to financial losses due to absenteeism, turnover, work quantity or work quality, productivity and efficiency (Schaufeli, 2003). In terms of this research, this implies

that performance of human resource practitioners can possibly be explained by burnout- and work engagement levels.

A previous study by Pieterse (2007) investigated the perception of performance levels of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company. The study indicated a gap between expected levels of performance (rated as exceptional) and current performance levels (rated as average), but could not provide evidence that the gap is caused by role expectations or by a lack of skills and knowledge. Pieterse (2007) suggested that burnout and work engagement be investigated as mediators or moderators of competence in future research.

The objective of this study was to determine whether burnout and engagement have an influence on the perceived value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company.

Work engagement

Schaufeli (2004, p.22) defines work engagement as "...a positive, affective-emotional state..." that has a positive influence on job performance, considered by some authors to be the direct opposite state of burnout (Rothmann, 2003). Schaufeli (2003) describes engagement as the positive antithesis of burnout, but still defines it as a concept in its own right and not merely the opposite of burnout, since it is not assessed by the opposite MBI (Maslach Burnout Inventory) profile of scores and because low or high levels of activation and pleasure constitute two independent dimensions of employee wellness (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). According to Maslach et al. (2001), work engagement is more complex and differs from organisational commitment, job satisfaction and job involvement, since it focuses on the relationship with the work itself rather than with the organisation or the need for fulfilment or contempt, and it also includes energy and effectiveness dimensions. According to Rothmann (2003), engagement is a "... positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption ..." described as an energetic state in which employees demonstrate work dedication and confidence in their own ability to perform at high levels.

Vigour is conceptualised by Storm and Rothmann (2003) as high levels of work energy, work resilience as well as persistence and willingness to apply energy to work activities. According to this view, vigorous employees do not fatigue easily. *Dedication* is described as a state in which employees perceive work as significant and experience it as inspiring and challenging (Rothmann, 2003). According to Rothmann (2003), absorbed employees find it difficult to detach from work. They experience time at work as passing quickly and forget about other things while at work.

Research by Billet (2001) indicates that workplace “readiness” influences engagement by providing the opportunity for employee participation. Work engagement is influenced by perceived competence, race and gender, work status, demarcation of work, relationships and perceived meaningfulness of work (Rothmann, 2003). It is also influenced by social-contextual events (positive feedback, communication and rewards) and is mediated by perceived competence. However, perceived competence will not enhance engagement if the individual’s internal locus of control is low. Career development, a rewarding work environment and positive identification with the organisation will also enhance engagement. Psychological strengths, from the fortigenic paradigm (e.g. sense of coherence, high internal locus of control, satisfaction with life, resilience, coping strategies and emotional intelligence) will lead to engagement (Rothmann, 2003). According to O’Brian et al. (2004), lower level employees are more resistant to engagement if they perceive themselves as not being respected or of low status or if they experience poor identification with the organisation. Employees at lower levels are also more reluctant to engage at higher than required levels.

Rothmann (2003) believes that more engagement research is needed to evaluate the effects of constructs from the fortigenic paradigm on burnout and engagement. According to Rothmann (2003), work engagement is the result of a match between individual and work domains of workload, control, reward, community (relationships), fairness and values. The UWES (Utrecht Work Engagement Scale) database of the Dutch language version (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) contains no data in respect of human resource practitioners or of workers in a chemical industry, which supports the recommendation of Storm and Rothmann (2003) regarding the need for research on the conceptualisation and measurement on engagement as an opposite state of burnout in other occupations to provide engagement level norms. This research attempts to determine whether perceived work performance of human resource

practitioners is influenced by their work engagement levels. Statistically meaningful positive correlations will imply that interventions that are aimed at increasing work engagement of human resource practitioners can be utilised to improve the work performance of human resource practitioners.

Burnout

In initial research, burnout was defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment of individuals working with people. In later research (Schaufeli, 2003) the definition was also extended to other work disciplines. Schaufeli (2003) confirmed that burnout is not limited to helping professions but also occurs outside the occupational context, e.g. in marriages, and sport. Cilliers (2003) defines burnout as a "... persistent, negative work-related state of mind ..." that develops over a period of time. Wiese, Rothmann, and Storm (2003) emphasize the fact that burnout develops in "normal" individuals in the work environment and that it is a prolonged work-related stress leading to inability to function at expected levels at work. Maslach et al. (2001) also emphasise the prolonged nature of burnout as a response to work-related emotional and interpersonal stressors, mostly related to relationship problems with clients, peers and family. It results in erosion of job engagement where the perception regarding work as challenging, important and meaningful changes to unpleasant, unimportant and meaningless. This transforms energy, involvement and efficacy into exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness (Maslach et al., 2001).

Efficacy. Schaufeli (2003) refers to efficacy as personal accomplishment, defining it as a personality characteristic rather than a component of burnout. According to Wiese et al. (2003), low efficacy can be described as a feeling of incompetence and inability to be productive and effective at work, caused by insufficient job resources. Pillai and Williams (2002) refer to efficacy as the ability to act appropriately in potential situations. According to this view, perceived self-efficacy of subordinates is a stable characteristic that refers to thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions which have a positive influence on commitment and performance and increases productivity during problem solving. *Cynicism* is described as a coping strategy to prevent exhaustion caused by excessive job demands and is described by Schaufeli (2003) as depersonalisation from work that leads to unwillingness to perform. According to Wiese et al. (2003), cynicism is a negative response to job-related aspects

caused by insufficient job resources. At lower organisational levels it is caused by little freedom to decide on participation, by mistrust, perceived status and power inequality, insufficient institutional support and perceived unequal benefits as well as lack of choice to participate (O'Brian et al., 2004). *Exhaustion* can be described as perceived overextension and depletion of emotional and physical resources (Wiese et al., 2003) caused by excessive job demands that eventually result in inability to perform. Individual and group interventions focussed on reducing exhaustion in the short term through increased awareness of work-related problems and developing individual coping mechanisms seem to be effective, but very little evidence of long term effectiveness could be traced (Schaufeli, 2003).

According to Schaufeli (2003), many employees of organisations in the western world (4% - 7% of the working population, 6.8% in human services and up to 10% in some other occupations) suffer from work-related mental problems, e.g. burnout. Research findings suggest that values play a mediating role between work environment domains in respect of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2004), personal motivation and personal goals also have an effect on burnout. Perceived progress in realising personal goals improves work wellness and health-orientation, while personal goals that are self-orientated rather than focussed on the development or benefit of others seem to have a negative effect on work well-being. However, demotivated employees can experience stress, fatigue, depression and alienation, but can theoretically not burn out (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004).

Burnout can be explained from a clinical as well as an organisational (social) perspective (Schaufeli, 2003). Seen from a clinical perspective, burnout is caused by personal characteristics, e.g. intra-personal conflict, personality traits or ineffective coping mechanisms (Wiese et al., 2003). According to Schaufeli (2003), no proof of different levels of burnout between males and females could be found, but it appears that older, more experienced and single employees with high workloads are at larger risk than younger, less experienced, married employees with lower workloads. Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that single and younger employees are at higher risk of burnout early in their career while they are relatively inexperienced. These authors also found that employees with poor self-esteem and external locus of control, employees with low hardiness as well as depression prone individuals are at higher risk of burnout. Seen from a social psychological perspective, burnout is the result of organisational, social and interpersonal factors (Schaufeli, 2003) that

focus on the relationship between the service provider (e.g. human resource practitioner) and the client (e.g. employees). It was for instance found that some culture groups are less prone to burnout than others (Schaufeli, 2003). According to Maslach et al. (2001), individual factors play a less distinct role in burnout than situational and organisational factors. Job mismatch, role conflict or role ambiguity, excessive workload and lack of social support from co-workers and supervisors can lead to burnout (Schaufeli, 2003). Other factors that increase the appearance of burnout are shift work (Wiese et al., 2003), higher levels of education, low involvement in work, low sense of control over activities, low acceptance of change, negative client feedback and insufficient work resources (Maslach et al., 2001). Six work environment domains are referred to in this regard i.e. excessive quantity and / or quality demands and lack of skills or resources, insufficient control over resources and freedom to act, emotional interaction with liked and respected people, treatment that is perceived as unfair or against the person's self-worth, conflict between personal values and work activities and perceived inequity between effort or outputs and benefits or recognition received.

Rothmann (2003) describes these factors as a mismatch between individual and work domains of workload, control, reward, community (relationships), fairness and values. Cilliers (2003) regards a misfit between work reality and intentions as an important cause of burnout. Tytherleigh (2003) found that extreme levels of personal interaction can in some instances also lead to burnout. According to Schaufeli (2003), burnout leads to atypical distress symptoms e.g. sleep disturbance, inability to relax, irritability and headaches. In severe cases it results in cognitive impairment as well as concentration and memory problems that reduce the individual's ability to handle complex tasks. Research done by Storm and Rothmann (2003) showed that burnout also has negative consequences for the organisation, especially in respect of decision-making and client services. According to Wiese et al. (2003), it leads to maladaptive coping strategies, e.g. avoidance, withdrawal, alcohol or drug abuse and anger. It also has the potential to result in depression when extended to the non-work environment (Maslach et al, 2001). Burnout can be contagious and will in many cases also influence the personal life of the burnt out individual (Maslach et al., 2001). Naude and Rothmann (2003) state that burnout leads to impaired performance and productivity, deterioration in customer service, health problems, turnover, absenteeism, accidents, substance abuse and destructive behaviours, e.g. rumour spreading and theft.

Storm and Rothmann (2003) also emphasise that many unanswered questions regarding burnout and stress still exist in the multicultural South African Society and suggest more attention to a fortigenic approach (Strumpfer, 2004; Tytherleigh, 2003) in this regard. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003) therefore is regarded as a more appropriate instrument for this research than the opposite MBI profile (Rothmann, 2003). In a South African study by Naude and Rothmann (2003) individual and inter-group, mostly extra-organisational stressors were identified. *Extra-organisational stressors* refer to autocratic organisation structures, managerial favouritism, low motivation, communication problems, perceived work status, remuneration equity and skills shortages. Client interaction, boring tasks, slow shifts, dangerous geographical location, lack of equipment, travelling, shift work, deadlines and administrative work are regarded as *individual stressors*. The term *Interpersonal stressors* refers to clashing personalities, change resistance and pettiness (Rothmann, 2003). Rothmann (2003) has found between 29% and 54.9% emotional exhaustion in South African studies, indicating that the work environment in South Africa is currently probably more demanding than ever before. According to Storm and Rothmann (2003), extraversion, low neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are negatively related to emotional exhaustion.

Engagement and burnout research has shown that service provision occupations (e.g. human resources) are by nature very demanding and interactive, which can easily cause emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001). Work situations that require suppression of emotions seem to lead to an increase in burnout (Wiese et al., 2003). According to Maslach et al. (2001), cynicism or depersonalisation can be an attempt to cope with burnout by trying to create emotional distance between the service worker and the client. Clients of service workers can perceive excessive detachment as negative, inhuman and callous. Rothmann (2003) believes that this can lead to deterioration of the quality of services rendered by service workers (e.g. human resource practitioners). Investigation of human resources roles is therefore appropriate. If the research findings of Schaufeli (2003), which have shown that 6.8% of human service workers suffer from a number of work wellness problems are considered to be accurate, it implies that approximately fifty of the human resource practitioners in the organisation where this research is done may suffer from burnout. According to Pieterse (2007), such a situation will influence the performance of these employees, which can have a negative influence on organisational performance. Statistically significant differences were also reported between the perceived performance of human resource practitioners and

performance expectations of line managers in the global petrochemical industry (Pieterse, 2007) in terms of the human resources role suggested by Ulrich (1997).

A previous study in the global petrochemical company where this research is conducted revealed statistically meaningful gaps between expected and perceived performances of human resource practitioners (Pieterse, 2007). That particular study did not show any statistically meaningful relationship between role expectations and perceived performance levels to explain such performance gaps. An analysis of the utilisation of EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) in this petrochemical company during 2005 / 2006 indicated relatively high EAP utilisation by human resource personnel; the highest of all functional areas in this organisation. This led the researcher to suggest that future studies should investigate the influence of personal factors such as burnout and engagement on perceived performance levels (Pieterse, 2007). In terms of this study it is hypothesised that the diverse job demands described in the literature review, which was done for this research, create unusual pressure on competence, personal resources and coping mechanisms of human resource practitioners, which probably has a negative effect on their work wellness and performance (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006).

The primary aim of this study is to confirm whether engagement and burnout can explain perceived performance gaps in the value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company.

METHOD

Research design

This explanatory research is structured in such a manner that it indicates the causality between variables (Mouton & Marais, 1990). A correlational study is used to investigate demonstrable relationships between dependent and independent variables.

Participants

The research is conducted in a South African petrochemical company (25 400 employees) that is operating in South Africa as well as in a number of other countries in Africa, Europe

and the United States. This research targets human resource practitioners who are considered to be in the best position to provide information on current and expected strategic human resource-related performance and distress or uestress levels.

The sample selected for this research includes all 709 human resource generalists / specialists in this organisation. Characteristics of the participants are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Younger than 36 Years	26	20,3
	36 – 40 Years	20	15,6
	41 – 45 Years	25	19,5
	46 – 50 Years	33	25,8
	Older than 50 Years	24	18,8
Gender	Male	75	58,6
	Female	53	41,4
Marital status	Single	7	5,5
	Married	107	83,6
	Separated/Divorced/Widower	14	10,9
Years with current employer	Less than 5 Years	21	16,4
	5 – 9 Years	29	22,7
	10 – 14 Years	20	15,6
	15 – 19 Years	20	15,6
	20 – 24 Years	18	14,1
	More than 24 years	20	15,6
Current position	Non-managerial	30	23,4
	First-line supervision	51	39,8
	Middle Management	32	25,0
	Senior Management	13	10,2
	Top Management	2	1,6
Years on current job level	Less than one Year	15	11,7
	1 – 2 Years	41	32,0
	3 – 4 Years	35	27,4
	5 – 6 Years	15	11,7
	Longer than 6 Years	22	17,2
Qualifications	Grade 12 or lower	24	18,8
	1 – 2 year diploma	12	9,4
	3 year diploma / degree	51	39,8
	Post-graduate	41	32,0

Secretarial human resource staff are excluded and only those administrative staff who are currently managing administrative human resource functions are included in the sample. A total of 709 questionnaires were distributed and 128 usable completed questionnaires were returned. This represents a response ratio of 18,1%.

Instruments

The *Human Resource Role-Assessment Survey (HRRAS)* was developed by Ulrich (1997) to explore the roles human resource practitioners are playing in organisations. Roles are presented in the form of statements, e.g. human resources help the organisation to achieve business goals, human resources participate in delivering human resource processes, etc. Items are scored on a five-point frequency rating scale, which indicates to what extent the respondent agrees with the statement, varying from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). The instrument is utilised to measure the perceived quality of performance of human resource practitioners on each subscale (Strategic Partnering (SP), Administrative Expertise (AE), Employee Support (ES) and Change Management (CM)). Cronbach alpha coefficients reported in this study vary from 0.91 (Perceived ability of human resources departments to provide administrative support) to 0,96 (perceived level of human resource practitioners' performance as change agents).

The *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* has three subscales that provide a three dimensional perspective of work engagement, namely vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Vigour is assessed by five items that refer to energy and resilience levels, willingness to invest effort in work and cope with fatigue, e.g. "I am bursting with energy in my work". Dedication consists of five items that refer to work enthusiasm and significance, e.g. "I am very resilient, mentally, in my job" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Absorption is measured by six items measuring the respondent's involvement and attachment to his work, e.g. "I am immersed in my work". Items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). Cronbach alphas of 0,83 (*Vigour*) and 0,92 (*Dedication*) and 0,82 (*Absorption*) indicated internal consistency.

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey (MBI-GS)* (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997) has three subscales that provide a three dimensional perspective of burnout, namely exhaustion, cynicism and low professional efficacy (Schaufeli, 2003). Exhaustion consists of

five items, e.g. "I feel emotionally drained from my work". Cynicism also consists of five items, e.g. "I have become less interested in my work since I started this job" and professional efficacy consists of six items, e.g. "I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my work" (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996). Items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). Cronbach alphas of 0,87 (Exhaustion), 0,73 (Cynicism) and 0,67 (Professional Efficacy) indicated internal consistency. Wiese et al. (2003) found similar internal consistencies (0,69 – 0,92). According to Rothmann (2003), satisfactory alpha coefficients have also been found for this instrument in South African studies (Exhaustion = 0,79 and Cynicism = 0,84). According to Schaufeli (2003), the MBI has good technical and psychometric properties but validity is questioned, as it does not comprehensively measure burnout-related symptoms such as cognitive impairment and distress. Maslach et al. (2001) reported that internal consistency and factor and construct validity of foreign language versions (German, Dutch & French) are similar to the American version of the MBI, although different burnout results were found in different countries. Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that the weighting of domains of work environments differ, which makes it necessary to consider the context during burnout research.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2003). Cronbach alpha coefficients were used to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs measured in this study. Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to determine relationships between variables. Step-wise regression analysis was used to determine to what extent perceived performance levels are predicted by Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of measuring instruments are presented in Table 2. Inspection of Table 2 indicates that, except for professional efficacy, scores are normally distributed. Cronbach alpha coefficients vary between 0,70 and 0,96, which is above the acceptable cut-off point of 0,70 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Alpha Coefficients

Items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Human Resource Role Assessment Survey					
Strategic Partnering	3,39	0,69	0,09	-0,08	0,94
Administrative Expertise	3,50	0,69	-0,37	-0,21	0,91
Employee Support	3,30	0,83	-0,44	-0,08	0,95
Change Management	3,28	0,82	-0,33	0,20	0,96
UWES					
Vigour	18,75	3,85	-0,72	-0,03	0,70
Dedication	24,84	4,68	-0,95	-0,12	0,78
MBI – GS					
Exhaustion	11,08	6,53	0,55	-0,31	0,81
Cynicism	5,48	5,99	1,04	0,09	0,89
Professional Efficacy	30,43	5,16	-1,32	1,53	0,85

Table 3 shows acceptable statistical significant correlation between the human resource practitioners' perception of their level of performance in terms of all these roles. Lower correlations were found between human resource practitioners' perception of their current performance and the importance of strategic partnering and administrative support and change management. Exhaustion is practically significantly (medium effect) related to change management. Cynicism is practically significantly related to all the human resources roles (medium effect in all cases).

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between the Scales

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Exhaustion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Cynicism	0,64***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Professional Efficacy	-0,26*	-0,43*+	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Vigour	-0,43*+	-0,56*++	0,63***	-	-	-	-	-
5. Dedication	-0,36*+	-0,63***	0,73***	0,77***	-	-	-	-
6. Strategic Partnering	-0,24*	-0,35*+	0,22*	0,18*	0,19*	-	-	-
7. Administrative Expertise	-0,18*	-0,33*+	0,28*	0,35*+	0,24*	0,68***	-	-
8. Employee Support	-0,20*	-0,40*+	0,22*	0,25*	0,23*	0,66***	0,75***	-
9. Change Management	-0,30*+	-0,44*+	0,24*	0,19*	0,25*	0,79***	0,67***	0,78***

* Statistically significant: $p < 0,05$

+ Practically significant correlation (medium effect): $r > 0,30$

++ Practically significant correlation (large effect): $r > 0,50$

Table 4 indicates the results of the multiple regression analysis for Strategic Partnering in terms of Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication. Table 4 indicates that 14% of the variance in the dependent variable (Strategic Partnering Performance) can be predicted by the independent variables (Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy and Vigour), as measured by the MBI – GS and the UWES. The multiple correlation of 0,37 is practically significant (medium effect). Table 4 further indicates that Cynicism is the best predictor of Strategic Partnering performance.

Table 4

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable - Strategic Partnering

Analysis of variance				
<i>R</i> = 0,37	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
<i>R</i> ² = 0,14	Regression	5	8,043	1,61
	Residual	119	51,31	0,43
	<i>F</i> = 3,37			
	<i>p.</i> = 0,004			
Variables				
Independent variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3,55	0,50	7,13	0,00
Exhaustion	-0,00	0,01	-0,36	0,72
Cynicism	-0,04	0,02	-2,54	0,01*
Professional Efficacy	0,02	0,02	1,41	0,16
Vigour	0,00	0,03	-0,02	0,99
Dedication	-0,02	0,02	-1,00	0,32

Results of the multiple regression analysis for administrative support in terms of Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication (as measured by the MBI – GS and the UWES) are displayed in Table 5. It is clear that 18% of the variance in terms of the dependent variable (Administrative Support) can be predicted by the independent variables. The multiple correlation of 0,43 is practically significant (medium effect). Table 5 further indicates that Cynicism, Dedication and Vigour are the best predictors of performance in terms of Administrative Support.

Table 5

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable - Administrative Expertise

Analysis of variance				
<i>R</i> = 0,43	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
<i>R</i> ² = 0,18	Regression	5	10,82	2,16
	Residual	119	48,54	0,41
	<i>F</i> = 5,30			
	Sig. = 0,00			
Variables				
Unrepentant variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	2,85	0,49	5,89	0,00
Exhaustion	0,01	0,01	0,97	0,33
Cynicism	-0,04	0,02	-2,47	0,02*
Professional Efficacy	0,02	0,02	1,40	0,17
Vigour	0,07	0,02	2,68	0,01*
Dedication	-0,05	0,02	-2,04	0,04*

* *p* < 0,05

Results of the multiple regression analysis for employee support in terms of Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication (as measured by the MBI – GS and the UWES) are depicted in Table 6. Table 6 indicates that 18% of the variance in the dependent variable (Employee Support) can be predicted by the independent variables. The multiple correlation of 0,43 is practically significant (medium effect). Table 6 further indicates that Cynicism is a statistically significant predictor of Employee Support Performance.

Table 6

Regression Analysis Dependent Variable - Employee Support

Analysis of variance				
<i>R</i> = 0,43	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
<i>R</i> ² = 0,18	Regression	5	15,61	3,12
	Residual	119	70,65	0,59
	<i>F</i> = 5,26			
	Sig. = 0,00			
Variables				
Variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3,43	0,56	5,86	0,00
Exhaustion	0,02	0,01	1,18	0,24
Cynicism	-0,07	0,02	-3,81	0,00*
Professional Efficacy	0,01	0,02	0,72	0,47
Vigour	0,03	0,03	1,08	0,28
Dedication	-0,04	0,03	-1,35	0,18

* $p < 0,05$

Results of the multiple regression analysis for Change Management Performance in terms of Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication (as measured by the MBI – GS and the UWES) are reflected in Table 7. Table 7 indicates that 20% of the variance in the dependent variable (Change Management Performance) can be predicted by the independent variables. The multiple correlation of 0,45 is practically significant (medium effect). Table 7 further indicates that Cynicism is a statistically significant predictor of Change Management Performance.

Table 7

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable - Change Management

Analysis of variance				
<i>R</i> = 0,45	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
<i>R</i> ² = 0,20	Regression	5	16,79	3,36
	Residual	119	67,24	0,57
	<i>F</i> = 5,94			
	<i>p</i> = 0,00			
Variables				
Variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3,70	0,57	6,48	0,00
Exhaustion	-0,00	0,01	-0,47	0,64
Cynicism	-0,06	0,02	-3,32	0,00*
Professional Efficacy	0,02	0,02	1,02	0,31
Vigour	-0,02	0,03	-0,79	0,43
Dedication	-0,01	0,03	-0,26	0,79

* *p* < 0,05**DISCUSSION**

The aim of this study was to confirm whether engagement and burnout have an influence on the perceived value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company. Practically significant relationships were found between Cynicism and perceived performance of human resource practitioners in terms of all the human resources roles suggested by Ulrich (1997), providing evidence that performance levels are affected by Cynicism. It was found that between 14% and 20% of the variance in terms of human resource practitioner performance can be predicted by Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy and Vigour, but that Cynicism is the best predictor of performance in terms of Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support and Change Management.

The human resource practitioners who participated in this study do not seem to experience significant burnout or engagement levels, which implies that the perceived performance gap is probably not caused by low work engagement or high burnout levels. However, the fact that further investigation indicated statistically meaningful relationships between Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy, Vigour and Dedication and perceived performance levels is important. It was found that Cynicism has significant predictable value regarding perceived performance of human resource practitioners in terms of all the human resources roles suggested by Ulrich (1997) and that Vigour and Dedication levels can be used to predict performance of human resource practitioners as Administrative Experts.

Human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical business need to fulfil a strategic partner role in the organisation by aligning human resource strategies with overall business strategies and by providing human resource infrastructure and capacity to translate such strategies into supportive human resource processes and activities (Worsfold, 1999). Modern human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry must also take care not to lose energy and dedication to the extent that they neglect the administrative and process support necessary to assist strategy execution. Research by Pieterse (2007) supports other research findings (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003; Van Zyl, 2002) which indicated that human resource practitioners as well as their line customers believe that the human resources department can influence the prosperity of the organisation by providing effective personal support through employee wellness programs and employee assistance programs. Human resource practitioners also have to assist employees in developing skills and knowledge to cope with change and to facilitate fundamental transformation and enduring change (Ulrich, 1997). Pieterse (2007) found that the change management role of human resource practitioners can be regarded as the most important contribution of human resource practitioners to organisational performance.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of the contribution of human resource practitioners to organisational effectiveness (Becker et al., 2001), this research suggests that wellness variables, i.e. cynicism can be used to predict perceived performance of human resource practitioners as strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change agents. This implies that perceived performance levels of human resource practitioners can be predicted by investigation of potential causes of cynicism, i.e. lack of decision making freedom and participation, mistrust, perceived status and power inequality, insufficient

institutional support and perceived unequal benefits as well as lack of choice to participate (O'Brian et al., 2004). Physical observations of line management behaviour during this study presented a number of examples of line managers frequently declaring human resource practitioners as business partners. However, frequent contradictory behaviour of line managers was also evident, e.g. where human resource practitioners were not involved in strategy development or decision making, advice from human resource practitioners regarding behavioural and human resource processes were ignored or overruled, where degrading and sarcastic remarks were made about the human resource profession and where the remuneration and benefits of human resource practitioners were substantially less than their peers in other functional areas. These observations fit the findings of O'Brian et al. (2004), suggesting sufficient reason to be concerned about cynicism among human resource practitioners in this organisation from a performance perspective. This is typical of a work situation that causes human resource practitioners to suppress their emotions, which can lead to an increase in burnout (Wiese et al., 2003). Higher cynicism levels under lower performing human resource practitioners is probably an attempt to cope with burnout by trying to create emotional distance between the human resource practitioner and the client (Maslach et al., 2001). The view of Rothmann (2003), namely that this can lead to deterioration of the quality of services rendered by service workers (e.g. human resource practitioners), is apparently supported by this study.

The results of this study imply that early detection and addressing human resource practitioner behaviour that indicates depersonalisation can prevent cynical and negative work attitudes, emotional detachment from work and increased self-interest, which can have a positive impact on achievement of the work objectives in this global petrochemical industry (Cilliers, 2003). It further emphasizes the importance of the personal profile of human resource practitioners in this organisation. Human resource practitioners with passive coping strategies (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2003; Wiese et al., 2003), abnormally high work expectations (Maslach et al., 2001) and an external locus of control (Rothmann & Malan, 2003) will probably be more inclined towards cynicism, which will negatively impact on perceived performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions aimed at improvement of perceived performance of human resource practitioners should include the measurement and prevention of cynicism levels and potential causes thereof. Job requirements and job resources that can potentially lead to cynicism should be monitored and addressed before it causes depersonalisation and unwillingness to perform at expected levels. Line customers should also be made aware that the quality of the service that they receive from human resource practitioners is influenced directly by line managers' attitude towards the status of the human resource function (O'Brian et al., 2004). According to Maslach et al. (2001), programs and interventions that attempt to decrease cynicism and depersonalization do not seem to be effective. Personal profiling of human resource practitioners during the recruitment and selection process should therefore include an evaluation of their inclination towards cynicism, passive coping strategies and external locus of control, since this research indicates that such attributes are related to lower performance levels in terms of the identified human resource practitioner roles.

The results of this study are limited by the fact that it was conducted in a single global petrochemical organisation, which implies that it is not necessarily valid for the total population of human resource practitioners. Further research in other types of organisations should be conducted to verify whether the results can be generalised. Future research should also attempt to confirm the conclusions stated in the discussion of the research results regarding the personal profile and coping mechanisms of human resource practitioners.

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CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH ARTICLE 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKAHOLISM, BURNOUT AND PERFORMANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS

ABSTRACT

The aims of this study were to determine the factorial structure of a workaholism instrument and to investigate the relationship between workaholism, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners. Stratified samples ($N = 128$) were taken of human resource personnel. A Workaholism scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - General Scale and the Ulrich Human Resource Role Assessment Survey were administered. A three-factor model of workaholism (consisting of Compulsiveness, Involvement and Overwork) was found which showed positive relationship with burnout factors. Multiple regression analysis showed that burnout and workaholism factors can explain perceptions of human resource practitioner performance.

OPSOMMING

Die oogmerke van die studie was om die faktorstruktuur te bepaal van 'n werkholisme-instrument, asook om die verwantskap tussen werkholisme, uitbranding en persepsies van prestasievlakke van mensehulpbron-praktisyns te bepaal. Gestratifiseerde steekproewe is getrek van mensehulpbron-personeel ($N = 128$). 'n Werkholismeskaal, die Maslach Uitbrandingsopname – Algemene Skaal en die Ulrich Mensehulpbron Rolevaluering Opname is afgeneem. 'n Drie-faktor Werkholismeskaal (bestaande uit Kompulsiwiteit, Werkbetrokkenheid en Oorwerk) met positiewe verwantskappe in terme van uitbranding faktore is gevind. Meervoudige regressie analise het getoon dat uitbranding en werkholisme faktore persepsies van mensehulpbron-praktisyns se prestasie kan verklaar.

There is general consensus under practitioners and academics that the contribution of human resource departments in organisations has become more important in recent years in making organisations more successful. (Raub, Alvarex, & Khanna, 2006). Despite expectations that human resource practitioners should fulfil the roles of strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change agents (Ulrich, 1997), the human resource function continues to be disconnected from line functions, to be excluded from strategy development and to be forced into transactional activities (Raub et al., 2006). Resolving the inconsistency between expected and perceived performance levels of human resource practitioners is developing into an important issue during attempts to improve general organisational effectiveness (Pieterse, 2007).

Some authors believe that workaholism has a positive influence on individual and organisational performance (Burke & Mathiessen, 2004), because workaholics are believed to be punctual, positive about the future of the organisation and supportive of organisational goals (Mudrack, 2004). However, Ersoy-Kart (2005) describes workaholism as an excessive and uncontrollable sustained need or a set of attitudes towards work (Douglas & Morris, 2006) compelling the workaholic to work, which holds permanent negative consequences for the wellness of the individual (Taris, Schaufeli, & Verhoefen, 2005). Flowers and Robinson (2002) define workaholism as a serious and legitimate compulsive disorder (Douglas & Morris, 2006) that results in overindulgence in work, exclusion of non-work activities and an inability to regulate work activities through self-imposed work demands. Such demands can, in terms of this research, create unusual pressure on competence, personal resources and coping mechanisms of human resource practitioners, which probably has a negative effect on their work wellness and performance (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006), e.g. increased burnout levels.

Research has shown that burnout can have an impact on individual and organisational performance (Schaufeli, 2003). If a worker perceives his/her own contribution as unvalued, it can lead to higher cynicism, which inhibits performance if it becomes a habitual pattern (O'Brian, et al., 2004). On an organisational level, burnout can lead to financial losses due to absenteeism, turnover, work quantity or -quality, productivity and efficiency (Schaufeli, 2003). In terms of this research, this implies that performance of human resource practitioners can possibly be explained by burnout levels.

The value-adding contribution of the human resource departments in the organisation where this study is done has also been under the spotlight for a number of years. The business is expanding continuously in South Africa and globally and discussions with business managers create the impression that human resource practitioners are not adding value according to expectations. It appears that every business manager has a different view on what the primary role of human resource practitioners should be. It also became evident that business managers expect a higher level of performance from human resource practitioners than is currently delivered. Discussions with human resource practitioners confirmed this point of view. This situation raises a concern in terms of the wellness of human resource practitioners in the global petrochemical industry. An analysis of the utilisation of Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) in this petrochemical company during 2005/2006 indicated relatively high EAP utilisation by human resource personnel – the highest of all functional areas in this organisation.

This led the researcher to suggest that future studies should investigate the influence of personal factors such as burnout at perceived performance levels (Pieterse, 2007). Such studies did not show any statistically meaningful relationship between role expectations and perceived performance levels to explain performance gaps. It did, however, indicate that cynicism was related to the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation in terms of all the human resource roles, and that vigour and dedication were related to the perceived performance on the transactional support role. Further investigation by the researcher revealed that human resource practitioners in this organisation occasionally display typical workaholic characteristics, e.g. being highly involved in work activities and a tendency to frequently work excessively long hours.

The objective of this study was to investigate the factorial structure of a measuring instrument of workaholism, and to determine the relationship between workaholism factors, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners.

Workaholism

McMillan, Brady, O'Driscoll, and Marsh (2002) define workaholism as an excessive focus on work without sufficient apparent economic objectives. According to Beulens and Poelmans (2004), it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that is made up of several sub-concepts including attempts to classify workaholics and non-workaholics as well as different types of workaholics.

Workaholism has been regarded as a *stable* individual difference characteristic (Burke, Burgess, & Fallon, 2006; Burke & Mathiessen, 2004). There is also a tendency to define workaholism in terms of hours worked, viewing the workaholic as a person who over-commits himself to work by spending the majority of his/her active time on work activities. Beulens and Poelmans (2004) found individuals who worked up to 168 hours per week. Some authors even define people who work more than 50 hours per week (Ersoy-Kart, 2005) or people who frequently work 12 hour days, as workaholics (Weiss, 2004). However, Ersoy-Kart (2005) found only weak correlations between hours worked and work enjoyment and drive which indicate that hours worked on its own can most likely not be an acceptable measure of workaholism. Conflicting findings were also reported in terms of working hours by McMillan et al. (2002). It seems that some workaholics strive to spend more time at home. Ersoy-Kart (2005) describes workaholism as an excessive and uncontrollable sustained need or a set of attitudes towards work (Douglas & Morris, 2006) compelling the workaholic to work, which holds permanent negative consequences for the wellness of the individual (Taris et al., 2005).

Flowers and Robinson (2002) define workaholism as a serious and legitimate compulsive disorder (Douglas & Morris, 2006) that results in overindulgence in work, exclusion of non-work activities and an inability to regulate work activities through self-imposed work demands. According to an equity-based definition (Taris et al., 2005), workaholics are people who regard the rewards they receive for hard work to be in balance with their work efforts. Some authors believe that workaholism can be defined as a *state* that holds positive consequences for the employer and the employee, especially seen from an organisational perspective (Burgess, Burke, & Oberklaid, 2006; Burke et al., 2004; Taris et al., 2005). Burke and Mathiessen (2004) dispute this statement and believe that workaholism cannot have both

positive and negative consequences and therefore support the concept of different types of workaholics.

Beulens and Poelmans (2004) typify workaholics based on work initiation and work involvement:

- Relentless workaholics are high on both work initiation and –involvement and are respected outside the family context
- Bulimic workaholics are low on initiation and high on completion, typified by procrastination, high productivity and achievement of challenging deadlines. They are so occupied with perfectionism that they struggle to initiate a project (Robinson, 2000).
- Attention deficit workaholics are high on initiation and low on completion. They tend to become bored quickly and then abandon projects to look for new challenges. They often suffer from undiagnosed Attention Deficiency Disorder (ADD) (Robinson, 2000).
- Savouring workaholics score low on initiation as well as completion. They tend to focus excessively on work methods rather than results, resulting in slow execution and creation of additional work.

Workaholics are also classified in terms of tendencies to think of work outside working hours, to spend unnecessary long hours at work at the expense of family and social life and to work more than expected. According to this classification, three types of workaholics are identified (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004):

- Compulsive dependent workaholics realise that they are working abnormally hard but are unable to control their behaviour in this regard
- Perfectionist workaholics display a need for order and to have mental and interpersonal control over their environment. They utilise various mechanisms, e.g. checklists and rules to maintain such control.
- Achievement orientated workaholics display a strong need for career identity and career progress. Beulens and Poelmans (2004) identified a new type of workaholic, namely the reluctant hard worker who is usually found at lower levels in the organisation. They score high on involvement but low on both drive and enjoyment. Such individuals tend to work long hours because of perceived external pressures and a sense of duty rather than personal growth needs and display a strong intention to leave the organisation. According

to Beulens and Poelmans (2004), such individuals are characterised as being involved but underpaid, pressured and unhappy.

Workaholism is often characterised as a three-dimensional construct that comprises work involvement (related to hours spent at work), a lack of work enjoyment and drive (an addictive internal drive to work) (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004). McMillan et al. (2002) consider work involvement to be an attitude that does not necessarily result in certain work behaviours, which can also be measured with the Work Involvement Scale (WIS). Drive is described as an inner urge or addiction to work (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004), with the objective to experience internal fulfilment. According to this view, work involvement is regarded as the common factor (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004) in the categorisation of workaholics:

- Enthusiastic workaholics score high on all three dimensions (Burke et al., 2006) and are usually labelled as workaholics by themselves and others. They tend to be perfectionistic, according to Burke and Mathiessen (2004).
- Workaholics/work addicts score high on work involvement and drive, but low on work enjoyment
- Work enthusiasts score high on work involvement and enjoyment but low on drive.

According to Burke and Mathiessen (2004), three behaviour patterns are displayed by workaholics, i.e. compulsive-dependent, perfectionist and achievement orientated. Douglas and Morris (2006) describe workaholism in terms of behaviour patterns such as spending excessive time on work activities, thinking about work outside working hours and working more and harder than expected.

Various theories exist regarding the causes of workaholism. McMillan et al. (2002) state that it is caused by the fact that organisations often reward workaholic behaviours. Burke (2002) found that some types of organisations are more likely to support and promote workaholic behaviour, especially as they become more entrepreneurial (Burke, 2001). Employees who work long hours in such organisations are viewed as dedicated and committed, and technology that reinforces workaholic behaviours, e.g. home computers, laptop computers etc. are made available by the organisation to enable workaholics to continue with work-

related activities while not at work. According to Beulens and Poelmans (2004), workaholism is an unconscious attempt to address unmet psychological needs, while Ersoy-Kart (2005) ascribes it to attempts to avoid an unhappy family life. Financial problems often cause employees to try to earn additional income from overtime (Taris et al., 2005). Weiss (2004) describes workaholism as a continuation of college life where students become used to working long hours to be successful, into the person's working life. Research results concerning the influence of gender on workaholism differ, but some findings indicate a lower drive to work and more reluctance to delegate under females (Burgess et al., 2006), while Burke and Mathiessen (2004) also support the view that personal demographics, work situation characteristics, workplace values and low self-esteem increase workaholic behaviour. According to Douglas and Morris (2006), workaholism arises from the need to satisfy intangible needs, such as the need for social interaction, power, and recognition. Beulens and Poelmans (2004) found that workaholic tendencies are primarily caused by the drive dimension.

Workaholism can have an extensive negative impact at a personal and social level (McMillan et al., 2002) and usually causes serious social problems (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004), family disintegration and even fatal health problems (Robinson, 2000). Beulens and Poelmans (2004) found that compulsive dependant workaholics tend to become anxious and to feel purposeless if they do not think about work obsessively (Weiss, 2004). According to Taris et al. (2005), health problems are probably experienced by workaholics because they do not have sufficient time to recover from long hours before their next work shift begins, more so among work addicts than among enthusiastic addicts and work enthusiasts (Burke et al., 2006). Compulsive dependant workaholism leads to anxiety, stress and physical and psychological health problems (Burke & Mathiessen, 2004; Burke et al., 2004).

According to Flowers and Robinson (2002), workaholism can be detrimental to the workaholic's health, family relationships and child-raising and often causes dysfunctional families. However, Taris et al. (2005) report contradictory findings in terms of the relationship between workaholism and dysfunctional families. Although more estranged families were found among workaholics in some cases than among non-workaholics, other studies did not indicate meaningful relationships between divorce rates and workaholism. Taris et al. (2005) reported more anxiety and depression among workaholics, while Robinson (2000) found a higher tendency towards external locus of control among the children of

workaholic fathers than those of non-workaholic fathers. Workaholism leads to exhaustion (Taris et al., 2005), and some researchers consider workaholism to be the primary cause of burnout (Burke et al., 2006). According to Burke et al. (2006), work addicts experience more work-life imbalance and less satisfaction with life than non-workaholics. According to Burke et al. (2004), perfectionist workaholism relates positively to high stress, turnover and absenteeism.

The impact of the relationship between workaholism and performance is particularly relevant to this research. Research by Ersoy-Kart (2005) and Burke and Mathiessen (2004) indicate that workaholics tend to be reluctant to delegate (Weiss, 2004), which causes communication and cooperation problems in the work environment. According to Taris et al. (2005), workaholism has an influence on work–nonwork conflict and exhaustion as a result of perceived job demands. Some authors believe that workaholism has a positive influence on organisational as well as personal performance, especially as far as certain types of workaholism are concerned, e.g. enthusiastic workaholics (Burke & Mathiessen, 2004) and achievement orientated workaholics.

Mudrack (2004) found that such workers tend to be punctual, positive about the future of the organisation and supportive of organisational goals. However, Taris et al. (2005) found no relationship between workaholism and rewards such as salary increases or job satisfaction. Working more usually does not imply higher quality work output (Weiss, 2004). Workaholics find it difficult to connect with customers, since they are usually thinking about work activities that need to be done next rather than attending to the customer's needs. Workaholics might display less effective planning and diagnostic abilities because they usually are in a hurry and in a state of irritability. They create difficulties for co-workers (Burgess et al., 2006; Burke et al., 2004; Burke & Mathiessen, 2004) and perfectionist workaholism correlates positively with hostile relationships. Burke et al. (2006) refer to 360° feedback from peers of managers which indicated that work enjoyment has a positive influence on perceived work performance only when "feeling driven" scores were low. This indicates that excessive drive probably reduces work enjoyment and increases the intent to quit, resulting in lower job performance. Research results on job satisfaction and the intention to quit have been less consistent (Burke et al., 2004).

Some authors believe that workaholics are obsessive, unhappy and under-performing individuals (Burke and Mathiessen, 2004) who often suffer from fatigue, leading to work errors and accidents (Robinson, 2000). According to Burke and Mathiessen (2004), job-involved workaholics will be likely to experience high work satisfaction and perform well at work whereas compulsive workaholics will probably be poor performers (Burke et al., 2004). Burke and Mathiessen (2004) did, however, not find significant differences between objective career success indicators (job level, earnings, promotions etc.) and different workaholic types. Although the first workaholism measurements and research were conducted in as far back as 1978 (Burgess et al., 2006; McMillan et al., 2002; Taris et al., 2005), scientific understanding of it is still limited. According to Burke et al. (2004), researchers tend to avoid measurement concerns. The value of initial workaholism research was reduced by vague concepts, poor operational definitions and invalidated measures (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004). Only the enjoyment and drive dimensions have been confirmed by cluster and factor analysis. Statistically significant correlations have been found between enjoyment and job satisfaction and between drive and intrinsic work motivation but indications are that work involvement should be excluded from measurements. Although most of these issues have been addressed by instruments such as the WART and WorkBAT, several research issues still exist, e.g. and unrepresentative population groups, restricted samples, uncertainty about the relationship between workaholism and positive or negative organisational and personal outcomes as well as cultural bias.

According to Taris et al. (2005), 75% of workaholism research is conducted in the United States. Burke et al. (2004) report an apparent increase in workaholism research, but also an increase in conflicting views about the different types of workaholism and its impact on organisational effectiveness, personal and work effectiveness and performance. Increasing workaholism publicity indicate that a compelling case for more workaholism research exists, firstly to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon and secondly to develop methodologies to address its negative impact on the individual, society and organisations. Burke et al. (2006) believe that even replications of previous research are useful as it builds our knowledge-base regarding workaholism.

Burke et al. (2006) suggest building organisational structures that prevent disengagement burnout, e.g. staff development, ensuring realistic and manageable work requirements, effective reward and recognition, and building a work culture of fairness, belonging, respect,

justice and meaningful work. Weiss (2004) suggests the following strategies to "recover" from workaholism:

- Rethink the reasons for working
- Analyse working time to create awareness of how time is utilised
- Take incremental steps to change problematic work habits
- Value family relationships visibly
- Schedule leisure time and stick to the schedule
- Become and remain involved in enjoyable family and community activities

According to Burke (2002), organisations can reduce workaholic behaviour tendencies by:

- not rewarding workaholic behaviour
- ensuring that employees take sufficient vacation time
- developing workplace values that promote work-life balance and healthier lifestyles
- assisting employees in prioritizing and developing time management strategies
- teaching employees to delegate effectively
- providing self-help programs for workaholics

Burnout

Burnout was defined in initial research as emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment of individuals working with people. In later research (Schaufeli, 2003) the definition was also extended to other work disciplines. Schaufeli (2003) confirmed that burnout is not limited to helping professions but also occurs outside the occupational context, e.g. in marriages and sport. Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) define burnout as a "... persistent, negative work-related state of mind ..." that develops over period of time. Wiese, Rothmann, and Storm (2003) emphasise the fact that burnout develops in "normal" individuals in the work environment and that it is a prolonged work-related stress leading to inability to function at expected levels at work. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) also emphasize the prolonged nature of burnout as a response to work-related emotional and interpersonal stressors, mostly related to relationship problems with clients, peers and family. It results in erosion of job engagement where the perception of work as challenging, important and meaningful changes to unpleasant, unimportant and meaningless.

This transforms energy, involvement and efficacy into exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness (Maslach et al., 2001).

Professional Efficacy. Schaufeli (2003) refers to efficacy as personal accomplishment, defining it as a personality characteristic rather than a component of burnout. According to Wiese, Rothmann and Storm (2003), low efficacy can be described as a feeling of incompetence and inability to be productive and effective at work, caused by insufficient job resources. Pillai and Williams (2002) refer to efficacy as the ability to act appropriately in potential situations. According to this view, perceived self-efficacy of subordinates is a stable characteristic that refers to thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions which have a positive influence on commitment and performance and increases productivity during problem solving.

Cynicism is described as a coping strategy to prevent exhaustion caused by excessive job demands and is described by Schaufeli (2003) as depersonalisation from work that leads to unwillingness to perform. According to Wiese et al. (2003), cynicism is a negative response to job-related aspects caused by insufficient job resources. At lower organisational levels it is caused by little freedom to decide on participation, mistrust, perceived status and power inequality, insufficient institutional support and perceived unequal benefits as well as lack of choice to participate (O'Brian et al., 2004).

Exhaustion can be described as perceived over-extension and depletion of emotional and physical resources (Wiese et al., 2003) caused by excessive job demands that eventually result in inability to perform. Individual and group interventions focussed on reducing exhaustion in the short term through increased awareness of work-related problems, and developing individual coping mechanisms seem to be effective, but very little evidence of long-term effectiveness could be found (Schaufeli, 2003).

Pieterse (2007) found that between 14% and 20% of human resource practitioner performance can be predicted by burnout factors. According to Schaufeli (2003), many employees of organisations in the western world (4% - 7% of the working population, 6.8% in human services and up to 10% in some other occupations) suffer from work-related mental problems e.g. burnout. Research findings suggest that work attitudes play a mediating role between work environment domains in respect of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). According

to Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (2004), personal motivation and goals also have an effect on burnout. Perceived progress in realizing personal goals improves work wellness, and health-orientation, while personal goals that are self-orientated rather than focussed on development or benefit of others seem to have a negative effect on work well-being. However, demotivated employees can experience stress, fatigue, depression, and alienation but can theoretically not burn out (Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 2004). Job mismatch, role conflict or role ambiguity, excessive workload and lack of social support from co-workers and supervisors can lead to burnout (Schaufeli, 2003). Other factors that increase the appearance of burnout are shift work (Wiese et al., 2003), higher levels of education, low involvement in work, low sense of control over activities, low acceptance of change, negative client feedback and insufficient work resources (Maslach et al., 2001). Six work environment domains are referred to in this regard, i.e. excessive quantity and/or quality demands and lack of skills or resources, insufficient control over resources and freedom to act, emotional interaction with liked and respected people, treatment that is perceived as unfair or against the person's self-worth, conflict between personal values and work activities and perceived inequity between effort or outputs and benefits or recognition received.

Rothmann (2003) describes these factors as a mismatch between individual and work domains of workload, control, reward, community (relationships), fairness and values. Cilliers (2003) regards a misfit between work reality and intentions as an important cause of burnout. Tytherleigh (2003) found that extreme levels of personal interaction can in some instances also lead to burnout. According to Schaufeli (2003), burnout leads to atypical distress symptoms e.g. sleep disturbance, inability to relax, irritability and headaches. In severe cases it results in cognitive impairment as well as concentration and memory problems that reduce the individual's ability to handle complex tasks. Research by Storm and Rothmann (2003) showed that burnout also has negative consequences for the organisation, especially in respect of decision-making and client services. According to Wiese et al. (2003), it leads to maladaptive coping strategies, e.g. avoidance, withdrawal, alcohol or drug abuse and anger. It also has the potential to result in depression when extended to the non-work environment (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout can be contagious and will in many cases also influence the personal life of the burnt out individual (Maslach et al., 2001). Naudé and Rothmann (2003) state that burnout leads to impaired performance and productivity, deterioration in customer service, health problems, turnover, absenteeism, accidents, substance abuse and destructive behaviours, e.g. rumour spreading and theft. Naudé and

Rothmann (2003) estimated the burnout-related costs for the US industry and business at \$150 - \$180 billion.

Burnout is defined in terms of three dimensions in helping professions, e.g. the human resource function (Rothmann, 2003), namely emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and low personal accomplishment. According to Maslach et al. (2001), cynicism or depersonalisation can be an attempt to cope with burnout by trying to create emotional distance between the service worker and the client. Excessive detachment can be perceived as negative, inhuman and callous by clients of service workers. According to Maslach et al. (2001), depersonalisation is an attempt to ignore human qualities that make people unique so that they can be viewed as impersonal work objects. Rothmann (2003) believes that this can lead to deterioration of the quality of services rendered by service workers (e.g. human resource practitioners).

Investigation of the relationship between burnout and workaholism and its predictable value for human resource performance is therefore appropriate. Hence the primary aim of this study is to determine whether burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical industry can be predicted by workaholism factors.

Roles of the human resource function

According to Ulrich (1997), the human resource function has four roles, namely strategic partnering, transactional support, employee support, and change management.

Strategic partnering. The human resource role has evolved from administrative and transactional activities towards a more strategic approach with increased emphasis on knowledge workers whose value to the organisation can be expressed in financial terms as they are responsible for putting company values into practice and achieving organisational strategy (Beatty, Huselid, & Schneier, 2003). It is evident that line customers expect a move from the traditional focus on recruitment, training, appraising and rewarding to a business partnering role where human resource practitioners and operation managers are equally responsible for business results and competitiveness (Ulrich, 1997). Worsfold (1999) refers to modern human resource practitioners that should contribute to the business value chain as individual employees and consultants, influencing the performance and commitment of

employees. However, changing the priorities of line managers implies that human resource practitioners have to change what they do as well as how they are perceived to influence the mindset, competencies and behaviour of employees if they wish to be perceived as business partners (King, 2002). It is therefore accepted, for purposes of this research, that strategic partnering is an important component of human resource practitioner performance.

Transactional support and human resource process expertise. The importance of meaningfulness and alignment of people processes is still a significant component of human resource practitioner competence (Gratton, 2000). *People processes* in this context refers to processes in the traditional human resource value chain, i.e. recruitment, selection, placement, remuneration and benefits, training and development, employee relations and termination of the employment agreement. Human resource practitioners are expected to develop recruitment and selection strategies that will source and retain competence and intellectual property (Childre, Cryer, & Cooper, 2000) to sustain competitive advantage (Lawler & Finegold, 2000). Human resource departments are also expected to develop remuneration and training systems that reinforce the organisation's value systems. Haynes and Freyer (2000) refer to studies done in the mid and late 1990's, indicating positive relationships between human resource management practices and organisational performance which suggest that competence and commitment can be increased by effective training, communication, empowerment, and performance management systems.

Employee support. Human resource practitioners often support the philosophy of "people business is line business", suggesting that line management at least needs to be involved in all human resource management practices to ensure business performance (Vermeulen, 2003). Human resource practitioners need to demonstrate respect for people and should be seen as fair (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003), decisive and honest whenever people decisions, e.g. transformation, retrenchment and employment equity are necessary. Companies often outsource employee assistance programmes, possibly because internal human resource practitioners do not seem to have the competence or ability to provide the required employee support. The fact that employee wellness and employee assistance programmes are behaviourally based implies in terms of this research that human resource practitioners can influence the prosperity of the organisation by providing effective personal support to employees.

Change management. According to research done by the American Management Association, 84% percent of American companies were busy with and/or planning major change processes in the near future at the beginning of the millennium (Weber & Weber, 2001). Change has become the norm, and training and development programmes must facilitate relearning and re-envisioning (Treen, 2000) and should be designed to assist employees in “unlearning” redundant skills and knowledge and in adapting to shorter cycle times to facilitate fundamental and enduring change through real transformation (Ulrich, 1997). It has become necessary to manage organisational change as a continuous and dynamic process (Ashton, 1996). According to Bramson (2000), transformation and change processes will most probably fail if the “human ingredient” is ignored.

The ambiguity and contradictory findings that are referred to in previous studies (Pieterse, 2007) have certain important implications for this research. It emphasizes the need for empirical research to determine the relationship between the roles of the human resource function and performance (Christensen Hughes, 2002).

The literature reviewed for purposes of this study indicates support for the human resource roles suggested by Ulrich (1997). It also suggests that there is pressure on human resource practitioners to deliver a variety of specialised human resource services to contribute to business success in modern organisations. However, there seems to be contradictory views on the priority of the different human resource roles. This might indicate excessive and uncertain job demands that will most probably cause distress (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006) for human resource practitioners, which will make it difficult for them to perform according to the expectations of their customers. This could have a negative impact on the wellness of human resource practitioners, e.g. increase burnout and decreased work engagement levels. Porter (2006) reported that managers in a highly technological environment who had above average scores on work involvement also reported more than average health problems. Kaufman (2005) also refers to typical workaholic indicators such as technological assistance from the organisation that promotes workaholism (e.g. e-mail and laptop computers), over-commitment, and extended hours as drivers that eventually will lead to burnout. According to McMillan and O’Driscoll (2004), workaholics who experience low work enjoyment also tend to display typical burnout symptoms. Burke and MacDermid (1999) found that workaholics who experience high drive and low enjoyment tend to experience more job stress.

METHOD

Research design

A correlational study is used to investigate demonstrable relationships between dependent and independent variables.

Participants

The research is conducted in a South African petrochemical company (25 400 employees) that is operating in South Africa as well as in a number of other countries in Africa, Europe and the United States. This research targets human resource practitioners who are considered to be in the best position to provide information on current and expected strategic human resource-related performance and distress/uestress levels.

The sample selected for this research includes all 709 human resource generalists/specialists in this organisation. Secretarial human resource staff is excluded and only those administrative staff that are currently managing administrative human resource functions are included in the sample. A total of 709 questionnaires were distributed and 128 usable completed questionnaires were returned. This represents a response ratio of 18,1%. Characteristics of the participants are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Younger than 36 Years	26	20,3
	36 – 40 Years	20	15,6
	41 – 45 Years	25	19,5
	46 – 50 Years	33	25,8
	Older than 50 Years	24	18,8
Gender	Male	75	58,6
	Female	53	41,4
Marital status	Single	7	5,5
	Married	107	83,6
	Separated/Divorced/Widower	14	10,9
Years with current employer	Less than 5 Years	21	16,4
	5 – 9 Years	29	22,7
	10 – 14 Years	20	15,6
	15 – 19 Years	20	15,6
	20 – 24 Years	18	14,1
	More than 24 years	20	15,6
	Current position	Non-managerial	30
	First-line supervision	51	39,8
	Middle Management	32	25,0
	Senior Management	13	10,2
	Top Management	2	1,6
	Years on current job level	Less than one Year	15
1 – 2 Years		41	32,0
3 – 4 Years		35	27,4
5 – 6 Years		15	11,7
Longer than 6 Years		22	17,2
Qualifications		Grade 12 or lower	24
	1 – 2 year diploma	12	9,4
	3 year diploma / degree	51	39,8
	Post-graduate	41	32,0

Instruments

A number of different instruments are used in workaholism studies to measure workaholism. According to McMillan et al. (2002), the WorkBAT (Workaholism battery) has acceptable face validity and internal consistency, but its internal structure and construct validity is questioned. The WorkBAT is a self-report questionnaire with 25 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale which measures work involvement drive and enjoyment (related to job satisfaction). It is considered to be one of the few validated measures, although the validity of the WorkBAT is still questioned (Beulens & Poelmans, 2004). The Schedule for Non-

adaptive and Adaptive Personality Workaholism (SNAP-Work) is suggested as an alternative workaholism measure by McMillan et al. (2002). It is a forced choice (true/false) instrument with 18 items, including an Obsessive / Compulsive scale. The abridged version of the WART (Work Addiction Risk Test) (McMillan et al., 2002) is the oldest workaholism measurement instrument, according to Ersoy-Kart (2005). Beulens and Poelmans (2004) identify different dimensions to discriminate between workaholics and non-workaholics, i.e. compulsion (which is closely related to the drive dimension of the WorkBAT), control, impaired communication or self absorption, inability to delegate and self-worth. According to Flowers and Robinson (2002), only the first three are considered workaholism dimensions. The WART uses a four-point Likert scale, with a total score between 25 and 100. Flowers and Robinson (2002) as well as Taris et al. (2005) found that the compulsive tendencies subscale (8 items) of the WART rendered the same results (correlation 0.89, $p < 0.001$) as the full WART instrument, implying that this abridged version instead of the full WART can be used to measure workaholism.

Ersoy-Kart (2005) warns that different survey items might be needed for different populations. This led the researcher to select twenty questions from the above-mentioned workaholism instruments to form a Workaholism Scale for measurement of workaholism for purposes of this study.

The *Maslach Burnout Inventory – General Survey* (MBI-GS) (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997; Schaufeli et al., 1996) has three subscales that provide a three dimensional perspective of burnout, namely Exhaustion, Cynicism and low Professional Efficacy (Schaufeli, 2003). Exhaustion consists of five items, e.g. "I feel emotionally drained from my work". Cynicism also consists of five items, e.g. "I have become less interested in my work since I started this job" and professional efficacy consists of six items, e.g. "I can effectively solve the problems that arise in my work". Items are scored on a seven-point frequency rating scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 6 (*every day*). Cronbach alphas of 0,87 (Exhaustion), 0,73 (Cynicism) and 0,67 (Professional Efficacy) indicated internal consistency. Wiese et al. (2003) found similar internal consistencies (0,69–0,92). According to Rothmann (2003), satisfactory alpha coefficients have also been found for this instrument in South African studies (Exhaustion = 0,79 and Cynicism = 0,84). Schaufeli (2003) maintains that the MBI has good technical and psychometric properties, but that validity is questioned, since it does not comprehensively measure burnout-related symptoms such as cognitive impairment and distress. Maslach et al.

(2001) reported that internal consistency and factor and construct validity of foreign language versions (German, Dutch & French) are similar to the American version of the MBI, although different burnout results were found in different countries. Maslach et al. (2001) suggest that the weighting of domains of work environments differ, which makes it necessary to consider the context during burnout research.

The *Human Resources Role-Assessment Survey* (HRRAS) was developed by Ulrich (1997) to explore the roles human resource practitioners are playing in organisations. Roles are presented in the form of statements, e.g. human resources help the organisation achieve business goals, human resources participate in delivering human resource processes, etc. Items are scored on a five-point frequency rating scale that indicates to what extent the respondent agrees with the statement, varying from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*). The instrument is adapted for purposes of this study to include a rating of the level of importance of each subscale (Strategic Partnering, Administrative Expertise, Employee Support, and Change Management) in the questionnaire. The revised instrument is utilised to measure the perceived business enabling value of human resource practitioners' competencies/roles as well as the perceived quality of performance of human resource practitioners on each subscale (including strategic partnering, administrative expertise, employee support, and change management). Cronbach alpha coefficients reported in this study varied between 0,89 (Perceived Importance of human resource practitioners' responsibility to provide administrative support) and 0,96 (Perceived level of human resource practitioners' performance as change agents).

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2003). Principal factor extraction with oblimin rotation was performed through SAS FACTOR on 20 items selected for the Workaholism Scale. Cronbach alpha coefficients and factor analysis were used to assess the validity and reliability of the measuring instruments utilised in this study. Descriptive statistics (e.g. means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis) and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. Pearson's product moment correlation was used to determine relationships between variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine to what extent perceived performance levels and burnout are predicted by time compulsion, involvement and overwork.

RESULTS

Inspection of Table 2 reveals that three factors were extracted, accounting for 45,71% of the total variance in the data. Inter factor correlations varied between -0,28 and 0,28. A cut-off point of 0,30 was set for inclusion of items in a factor, which caused one item not to load on any of the three factors, i.e. being of the opinion that it is important to work hard while not deriving satisfaction from all activities. The proportion of variance accounted for by the factors varies between 27,64% (Compulsiveness) and 8,72% (Overwork).

Items loading on the first factor (Compulsiveness) seem to be related to tendencies to be driven by an uncontrollable urge or compulsion to work hard, feelings of guilt when not being at work and an inner resistance against wasting time. The second factor (Work Involvement) consisted of items related to being busy and being involved in work activities. The third factor (Overwork) seems to be related to spending an unacceptable number of hours on work activities or being overworked.

Table 2

Factor Loadings for the Workaholism Scale

<i>Item</i>	<i>F₁</i>	<i>F₂</i>	<i>F₃</i>
I am experiencing an inner drive to work hard: I must, willing or unwillingly	0,78	0,00	0,00
I often have the feeling that something deep within compels me to work	0,69	0,00	0,00
I feel guilty when I am not working	0,66	0,00	0,00
Wasting time is just as bad as spending money like water	0,49	0,00	0,00
I feel guilty if I take off from work	0,45	0,00	0,00
To me things cannot go too quickly nor can be done too quickly,	0,37	0,00	0,00
At work I put myself under pressure by setting deadlines for myself	0,36	0,00	0,00
I am busy and have too many irons in the fire	0,00	-0,74	0,00
I wish I was less involved in my work	0,00	-0,72	0,00
I am busy with a number of things simultaneously, While I am writing a memo, I am eating and speaking on the telephone	0,00	-0,70	0,00
I burn my fingers by biting off more than one can chew	0,00	-0,68	0,00
I am in a hurry and work with deadlines	0,00	-0,53	0,00
I feel obliged to work hard though I do not always find it enjoyable	0,00	-0,50	0,00
I often think of my work even when I momentarily feel the urge to have nothing to do with it	0,00	-0,31	0,00
I take work home almost every day	0,00	0,00	-0,87
I often work over weekends	0,00	0,00	-0,78
I am more dedicated to my work than to my friends, hobbies and other leisure activities	0,00	0,00	-0,75
I pay more attention to and spend more energy on my work than on my relations with friends and my loved-ones	0,00	0,00	-0,70
I carry on working while my colleagues go home	0,00	0,00	-0,44
I am of opinion that it is important to work hard while I do not really derive satisfaction from all my activities	0,00	0,00	0,00
Percentage variance	27,64	9,35	8,72

Factor labels: F1 Compulsiveness; F2 Work Involvement; F3 Overwork

Descriptive statistics and internal consistencies of the scales of the measuring instruments are presented in Table 3. Table 3 indicates that the alpha coefficients of all scales are highly acceptable according to the guideline of 0,70 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach Alpha Coefficients

Items	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
WORKAHOLISM					
Compulsiveness	3,69	0,72	-0,39	-0,25	0,79
Work Involvement	3,21	0,81	-0,22	-0,15	0,82
Overwork	3,25	0,99	-0,14	-0,74	0,86
MBI – GS					
Exhaustion	11,08	6,53	0,55	-0,31	0,81
Cynicism	5,48	5,99	1,04	0,09	0,89
Professional Efficacy	30,43	5,16	-1,32	1,53	0,85
Human Resource Role Assessment Survey					
Strategic Partnering	3,39	0,69	0,09	-0,08	0,94
Administrative Expertise	3,50	0,69	-0,37	-0,21	0,91
Employee Support	3,30	0,83	-0,44	-0,08	0,95
Change Management	3,28	0,82	-0,33	0,20	0,96

Correlation between the subscales is reflected in Table 4. Table 4 shows practically significant positive correlation coefficients (medium effect) between Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork.

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients between the Scales

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Compulsiveness	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Work Involvement	0,48**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Overwork	0,49**	0,41**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Exhaustion	0,18*	0,61***	0,29*	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Cynicism	0,11	0,42**	0,06	0,64***	-	-	-	-	-
6. Professional Efficacy	-0,20*	-0,30*	-0,11	-0,26*	-0,43**	-	-	-	-
7. Strategic Partnering	-0,11	-0,20*	0,10	-0,24*	-0,35**	0,22*	-	-	-
8. Administrative Expertise	-0,11	-0,11	0,05	-0,18*	-0,33**	0,28*	0,68***	-	-
9. Employee Support	-0,11	-0,10	0,06	-0,20*	-0,40**	0,22*	0,66***	0,75***	-
10. Change Management	-0,11	-0,19*	0,09	-0,30**	-0,44**	0,24*	0,79***	0,67***	0,78***

* Statistically significant: $p < 0,05$

+ Practically significant correlation (medium effect): $r > 0,30$

++ Practically significant correlation (large effect): $r > 0,50$

Compulsiveness correlates statistically significantly with Exhaustion and is negatively related to Professional Efficacy. Work involvement correlates practically significantly with Exhaustion (large effect), as well as with Cynicism (medium effect). Work involvement is also negatively related (statistically significant) to Professional Efficacy, Strategic Partnering and Change Management. Overwork correlates positively (statistically significant) with Exhaustion.

The results of a multiple regression analysis for Strategic Partnering in terms of Compulsiveness, Work Involvement, Overwork, Exhaustion, Professional Efficacy and Cynicism (as measured by the MBI-GS and the workaholism scale) are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable – Strategic Partnering

Analysis of variance				
$R = 0,33$	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
$R^2 = 0,11$	Regression	6,00	9,87	1,65
	Residual	121,00	83,22	0,69
	$F = 2,392$			
	$p = 0,032$			
Variables				
Independent variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	4,25	0,72	5,93	0,00
Compulsiveness	-0,13	0,12	-1,06	0,29
Work Involvement	-0,24	0,13	-1,85	0,07
Overwork	0,20	0,09	2,21	0,03*
Exhaustion	0,07	0,09	2,21	0,45
Professional Efficacy	-0,07	0,11	-0,59	0,56
Cynicism	-0,13	0,08	-1,57	0,12

* $p < 0,05$

It is clear that 11% of the variance in terms of the dependent variable (Strategic Partnering) can be predicted by the independent variables. The multiple correlation of 0,33 is statistically significant (medium effect). Table 5 further indicates that Overwork is the best predictor of performance in terms of Strategic Partnering.

The results of a multiple regression analysis for Administrative Support in terms of Compulsiveness, Work Involvement, Overwork, Exhaustion, Professional Efficacy and Cynicism (as measured by the MBI-GS and the workaholism scale) are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable – Administrative Support

Analysis of variance				
	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
$R = 0,23$				
$R^2 = 0,05$	Regression	6,00	4,88	0,81
	Residual	121,00	90,29	0,75
	$F = 1,090$			
	$p = 0,372$			
Variables				
Independent variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3,57	0,75	4,78	0,00
Compulsiveness	-0,15	0,13	-1,20	0,23
Work Involvement	-0,05	0,13	-0,38	0,70
Overwork	0,13	0,09	1,35	0,18
Exhaustion	0,01	0,09	0,15	0,88
Professional Efficacy	0,06	0,12	0,52	0,60
Cynicism	-0,08	0,08	-0,93	0,36

* $p < 0,05$

Table 6 indicates that 5% of the variance in the dependent variable (Administrative Support) can be predicted by the independent variables. However, the independent variables did not significantly predict Administrative Support.

The results of a multiple regression analysis for Employee Support in terms of Compulsiveness, Work Involvement, Overwork, Exhaustion, Professional Efficacy and Cynicism (as measured by the MBI-GS and the workaholism scale) are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable – Employee Support

Analysis of variance				
	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
$R = 0,29$				
$R^2 = 0,08$	Regression	6,00	9,58	1,60
	Residual	121,00	108,62	0,90
	$F = 1,777$			
	$p = 0,109$			
Variables				
Independent variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3,87	0,82	4,73	0,00
Compulsiveness	-0,21	0,14	-1,52	0,13
Work Involvement	-0,01	0,15	0,08	0,93
Overwork	0,14	0,10	1,37	0,17
Exhaustion	0,02	0,10	0,19	0,85
Professional Efficacy	-0,02	0,13	-0,16	0,87
Cynicism	-0,18	0,09	-1,97	0,05*

* $p < 0,05$

Analysis of Table 7 reveals that 8% of the variance in the dependent variable (Employee Support) is predicted by the independent variables. Table 7 further indicates that Cynicism is a statistically significant predictor of Employee Support performance.

The results of a multiple regression analysis for Change Management in terms of Compulsiveness, Work Involvement, Overwork, Exhaustion, Professional Efficacy and Cynicism (as measured by the MBI-GS and the workaholism scale) are reflected in Table 8.

Table 8

Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable – Change Management

Analysis of variance				
$R = 0,36$	Model	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean Squares
$R^2 = 0,13$	Regression	6,00	15,03	2,50
	Residual	121,00	100,60	0,83
	$F = 3,013$			
	$Sig. = 0,009$			
Variables				
Independent variable	B	Standard error of B	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	4,28	0,79	5,44	0,00
Compulsiveness	-0,21	0,13	-1,58	0,12
Work Involvement	-0,12	0,14	-0,85	0,40
Overwork	0,22	0,10	2,17	0,03*
Exhaustion	0,00	0,10	0,03	0,97
Professional Efficacy	-0,07	0,12	-0,57	0,57
Cynicism	-0,19	0,09	-2,10	0,04*

* $p < 0,05$

Table 8 indicates that 13% of the variance in the dependent variable (Change Management) is predicted by the independent variables. The multiple correlation of 0,36 is practically significant (medium effect). Table 8 further shows that Overwork and Cynicism are statistically significant predictors of Change Management performance.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was firstly, to determine the factorial structure of a set of questions extracted from workaholism instruments and then, to determine the relationship between workaholism factors, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners. A three-factor model of workaholism (consisting of Compulsiveness, Involvement and Overwork) was found. The results showed that workaholism and burnout explains inadequate performance levels of human resource practitioners in terms of strategic partnering, employee support and change management in a global petrochemical organisation.

Three workaholism factors with highly acceptable alpha coefficients were extracted, namely Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork. Factor analysis revealed that variance accounted for by the factors varies between 27,64% (Compulsiveness), 9,35% (Work Involvement) and 8,72% (Overwork). Compulsiveness can be described as a strong inner drive to be continuously involved in work activities. According to the findings of Beulens and Poelmans (2004), workaholic tendencies are primarily caused by the inner drive dimension, described as an inner urge or addiction to work. Work involvement, which is regarded by Beulens and Poelmans (2004) as the common factor in the categorisation of workaholics indicates the extent to which the person is busy with work activities. The items that loaded on this factor seem to refer to a need to be less involved with work activities. Overwork is related to the amount of time spent on work-related activities.

Positive relationships were found between Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork. Because workaholism is considered a stable individual difference characteristic (Burke et al., 2006; Burke & Mathiessen, 2004), the workaholism scale proposed in this research can be utilised specifically for human resource practitioners during human resource processes e.g. recruitment and selection, rotation, personal development, and wellness measurements. Highly acceptable alpha coefficients and covariances indicated that the revised questionnaire can be used to determine workaholism scores of human resource practitioners in this global petrochemical organisation.

According to the findings of this study, compulsiveness is associated with increased Exhaustion and decreased Professional Efficacy. These results demonstrated that human resource practitioners in this organisation who tend to be compulsive about their work, experience feelings over-extended, depletion of emotional and physical resources, incompetence and unproductiveness.

Stronger work involvement is clearly associated with increased burnout (higher exhaustion and cynicism and reduced professional efficacy) as well as with lower performance scores on strategic partnering and change management. It was also found that overwork correlates positively with exhaustion. This supports the findings of Ersoy-Kart (2005), who describes workaholism as an excessive and uncontrollable sustained need or a set of attitudes towards work (Douglas & Morris, 2006), compelling the workaholic to work, which holds permanent negative consequences for the wellness of the individual (Taris, et al., 2005), e.g. increased

burnout levels. These findings imply that workaholic human resource practitioners will probably at some stage begin to suffer from burnout. Seen from a wellness perspective, the compulsiveness, work involvement and overwork scales can therefore be used to proactively predict burnout under human resource practitioners in this organisation.

Multiple regression analysis showed that burnout (Exhaustion, Cynicism, and decreased Professional Efficacy) and workaholism factors (Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork) can explain perceptions of human resource practitioner performance in terms of Strategic Partnering (11% of the variance), Administrative Support (5% of the variance), Employee Support (8% of the variance) and Change Management (13% of the variance).

Perceived performance as strategic partners, described as supporting of business strategies and contributing to realisation of strategic business objectives by Ulrich (1997), was best explained by perceptions of being overworked. This means that human resource practitioners in this organisation who believe that they are spending an unacceptable amount of time on work activities are viewed as more effective strategic partners. These findings might imply that workaholism under human resource practitioners is caused by organisational appreciation for working excessive hours. This supports the studies of Burke (2001), who found that organisations sometimes promote workaholism e.g. by making equipment available to make it easier to work longer hours. However, it contradicts the view of Weiss (2004) that working more does not imply higher quality work output.

Perceived performance in terms of the employee support role is best explained by cynicism, described as depersonalisation and negative responses to job related aspects by Wiese et al. (2003). It was found that human resource practitioners who perceive themselves as positive towards their work are viewed as more successful in providing effective personal support to employees.

Change management support, described as facilitating fundamental and enduring organisational change as a continuous and dynamic process is best predicted by self perceptions of cynicism and being overworked. This study showed that human resource practitioners, who perceive themselves as non-cynical and spending excessive time on work activities are perceived to be better change managers in this organisation. This supports the

findings of Schaufeli (2003) and O'Brian et al. (2004), namely that high cynicism levels can inhibit performance if it becomes a habitual pattern.

The results of this study confirm other research findings that cynicism and individual performance (Schaufeli, 2003; O'Brian et al., 2004) are negatively related. It also supports the results of studies by Burke and Mathiessen (2004) and Mudrack (2004) that workaholism is perceived as beneficial to the organisation in the short term, but that it could hold serious negative wellness implications for the individual in the longer term. However, because of the nature of the design of this study the direction of relationships is not clear. This study could for example not determine if burnout under human resource practitioners is caused by extreme levels of interaction (Tytherleigh, 2003) with employees who need personal support, or if burnout as result of ineffective coping mechanisms (Wiese et al., 2003) lead to inadequate employee support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempted to contribute to the resolution of workaholism research issues, e.g. unrepresentative population groups, restricted samples, uncertainty about the relationship between workaholism and positive or negative organisational and personal outcomes as well as cultural bias. Previous studies (McMillan et al., 2002) state that workaholism is caused by organisations that support and reward workaholic behaviours, especially as they become more entrepreneurial (Burke, 2001). This study confirms that employees who work long hours in such organisations are viewed as dedicated and committed, but also supports the stance of Beulens and Poelmans (2004) and Ersoy-Kart (2005), who consider workaholism sometimes to be a manifestation of wellness issues rather than a positive work attitude. It is suggested that organisations should be cautioned against promoting workaholic tendencies by human resource practitioners, as it emerged from this study that workaholism is related to burnout and perceived inadequate performance. This implies that promoting workaholism might inhibit rather than facilitate achievement of organisational objectives.

Although the findings provided meaningful results, it is still limited by the fact that it was conducted in a single global petrochemical organisation, which implies that it is not necessarily valid for the total population of human resource practitioners. Further research in other types of organisations should be conducted to verify whether the results can be

generalised. Future research should attempt to confirm the conclusions stated in the discussion of the research results regarding the utilisation of the workaholism scale for explaining and predicting human resource practitioner performance and burnout. It is also necessary to determine the direction of the relationship between workaholism, burnout and performance during future studies.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide conclusions in respect of the findings from three empirical studies regarding the relationship between work-related well-being and perceived performance levels of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical organisation. The conclusions are based on the objectives of the three research articles. The limitations of the studies are discussed, followed by recommendations for the organisation and for future research.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The general objective of this study was to determine perceived importance and actual performance of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company in terms of human resource roles, and to determine the influence of work wellness (burnout, engagement and workaholism) on the perceived value adding contribution of human resource practitioners in a global petrochemical company. This study confirmed the stance of Ulrich (1997) that internal customers in a global petrochemical organisation expect human resource practitioners to contribute to business results. It further emerged from the study that the contribution of human resource practitioners in terms of these roles are perceived as inadequate if compared to the expectations of internal customers in this organisation. Statistics revealed that burnout factors have statistically meaningful predictable value in terms of the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation. It was found that cynicism has statistically meaningful predictable value for the perceived level of performance of human resource practitioners in the organisation in terms of all the human resource roles, and that vigour and dedication hold statistically meaningful predictable value for perceived performance on the transactional support role. The Workaholism Scale proved to be a valid instrument to predict burnout and inadequate performance levels of human resource practitioners.

The first research objective was to conceptualise human resource practitioner competence from existing literature and to identify those human resource competencies and roles that managers in the South African petrochemical industry perceive to be necessary to enable

human resource practitioners to support business strategies. The results of this study confirmed that the original factorial structure of the Human Resource Role Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997), accounting for a proportion of variance ranging between 50,84% and 63,43% can be retained. Four factors were confirmed. The first factor represents the Strategic Partnering role of the human resources department, referring primarily to the participation of human resource practitioners in business strategy development and the positioning of the activities of the human resources department to facilitate strategy implementation. The second factor (Administrative Support) refers to the development, implementation and maintenance of functional human resource processes. The third factor, Employee Support, refers to the responsibility of human resource practitioners to ensure personal support and fairness in human resource processes. Change Management, the fourth factor, refers to the role of human resource practitioners to facilitate the ever-increasing change initiatives in the organisation. The results of the study supports other research findings (Snelgar & Potgieter, 2003; Ulrich, 1997; Van Zyl, 2002) in terms of the value-adding contribution that organisations expect from human resource practitioners as strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change managers. Statistical analysis of the HRRAS responses revealed that human resource practitioners perceive their performance as strategic partners ($M = 3,39$; $SD = 0,69$) as significantly lower than their own and internal customers' perceived importance of this role ($M = 4,52$; $SD = 0,51$; $t = 16,35$; p (two-tailed) $< 0,01$). Similar significant and statistically meaningful results were found in terms of the difference between perceived performance as administrative experts ($t = 10,55$; p (two-tailed) $< 0,01$), employee champions ($t = 11,40$; p (two-tailed) $< 0,01$) and change managers ($t = 14,80$; p (two-tailed) $< 0,01$) and the perceived importance of these roles. Effect sizes are practically meaningful (large effect, $d > 0,80$). The administrative expert role was rated slightly more important by human resource practitioners than by their line customers.

The second objective of this study was to determine the relationship between levels of work engagement of human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry, and their level of performance as perceived by business managers. Although statistically significant relationships between vigour and dedication and human resource practitioner performance emerged from the statistical analysis, the human resource practitioners who participated in this study do not experience significantly low engagement levels, which mean that this study did not prove that perceived performance gaps are caused by low work engagement levels. However, it is evident from regression analysis that vigour and dedication

levels can be used to predict performance of human resource practitioners as administrative experts.

The third objective was to determine the relationship between levels of burnout of human resource practitioners in the South African petrochemical industry and their level of performance as perceived by business managers. The human resource practitioners who participated in this study do not seem to experience significant burnout levels, which mean that this study did not prove that perceived performance gaps are caused by high burnout levels. However, the fact that multiple regression analysis indicated statistically meaningful relationships between Exhaustion, Cynicism, Professional Efficacy and perceived performance levels is important. It is suggested that Cynicism can be used to predict perceived performance of human resource practitioners as strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change agents. This implies that perceived inadequate performance levels of human resource practitioners can be predicted by investigating potential causes of cynicism e.g. lack of decision-making freedom and participation, mistrust, perceived status and power inequality, insufficient institutional support and perceived unequal benefits as well as lack of choice to participate. The view of Rothmann (2003), namely that burnout can lead to deterioration of the quality of services rendered by service workers (e.g. human resource practitioners), is supported by this study. The results of this study imply that early detection and addressing human resource practitioner behaviour that indicates depersonalisation can prevent cynical and negative work attitudes, emotional detachment from work and increased self-interest (Wiese, Rothmann, & Storm, 2003). This can have a positive impact on the achievement of the work objectives in this global petrochemical industry.

The fourth objective of this study was to investigate the factorial structure of a measuring instrument of workaholism, and to determine the relationship between workaholism factors, burnout and perceived levels of performance of human resource practitioners. Three workaholism factors were extracted (Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork), accounting for 45,71% of the total variance in the data. Factor analysis revealed that variance accounted for by the factors varies between 27,64% (Compulsiveness), 9,35% (Work Involvement) and 8,72% (Overwork). Inter factor correlations varied between -0,28 and 0,28. A cut-off point of 0,30 was set for inclusion of items in a factor, which caused one item not to load on any of the three factors, i.e. being of the opinion that it is important to work hard

while not deriving satisfaction from all activities. Statistical analysis revealed that Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork are positively correlated. According to the findings of this research, human resource practitioners in this organisation who tend to be compulsive about their work experience less professional efficacy and a higher level of exhaustion. Higher Work Involvement is also associated with lower performance scores on Strategic Partnering and Change Management. It was also found that Overwork correlates positively with Exhaustion. Results from multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the Compulsiveness and Work Involvement scales can, from a wellness perspective be used to predict burnout under human resource practitioners in this organisation.

Multiple regression analysis showed that burnout (Exhaustion, Cynicism, and decreased Professional Efficacy) and workaholism factors (Compulsiveness, Work Involvement and Overwork) can explain perceptions of human resource practitioner performance in terms of Strategic Partnering (11% of the variance), Administrative Support (5% of the variance), Employee Support (8% of the variance) and Change Management (13% of the variance). Perceived performance as strategic partners was best explained by perceptions of being overworked. This means that human resource practitioners in this organisation who believe that they are spending an unacceptable amount of time on work activities are viewed as more effective strategic partners, which might imply that workaholism under human resource practitioners is caused by appreciation for working excessive hours. Perceived performance in terms of the employee support role is best explained by cynicism. It was found that human resource practitioners who perceive themselves as positive towards their work are viewed as more successful in providing effective personal support to employees. The study showed that human resource practitioners, who perceive themselves as non-cynical and spending excessive time on work activities are perceived to be better change managers in this organisation. The results of this study confirm other research findings that cynicism and individual performance (Schaufeli, 2003; O'Brian et al., 2004) are negatively related. It also supports the results of studies by Burke and Mathiessen (2004) and Mudrack (2004) that workaholism is perceived as beneficial to the organisation in the short term, but that it could hold serious negative wellness implications for the individual in the longer term.

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had various limitations that should be noted. The sample size and sampling method constitute the first limitation. Human resource practitioners from only one international petrochemical organisation who voluntarily took part in the study were included in the sample.

A second limitation is that participant characteristics that are regarded to be indicators of competence were excluded, because this study only considered characteristics that influence skills and knowledge. Other variables that could distort perception scores regarding current performance levels might also be present, e.g. the use of forced ranking to ensure that performance ratings are normally distributed.

The third limitation involves the use of self-report measures that could have led to “common method variance” which could lead to an overestimation of the correlations studied.

Although the survey design used in this research is economical and the research information, within sampling error, can be regarded as accurate, this type of design holds the disadvantage of being time and energy consuming (Kerlinger, 1986). The results of this study confirm other research findings that cynicism and individual performance (Schaufeli, 2003; O’Brian et al., 2004) are negatively related. It also supports the results of studies by Burke and Mathiessen (2004) and Mudrack (2004) that workaholism is perceived as beneficial to the organisation in the short term, but that could hold serious negative wellness implications for the individual in the longer term. However, because of the nature of the design of this study the direction of relationships is not clear.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for both the organisation and for future research are made in this section.

5.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation

Results from this study potentially hold purpose and meaning if it is incorporated with human resource practitioner talent management processes and interventions. Such interventions

could facilitate improved work-wellness of human resource practitioners and may also facilitate the building of competence and capacity in the human resource team to enable contribution to the bottom line results of the organisation.

This study confirmed the validity of the human resource roles suggested by Ulrich (1997) as relevant performance areas in an international petrochemical industry. This implies that perceived performance levels of human resource practitioners could be improved by creating capacity in human resource teams to deliver as strategic partners, administrative experts, employee champions and change agents. This can be achieved by aligning recruitment and selection, training, personal development, rewards and recognition, and performance management processes of human resource practitioners to build competence in terms of these roles. It is also important to structure human resource strategies and activities around these roles. According to Maslach, Jackson, and Leiter (2001), programs and interventions that attempt to decrease cynicism and depersonalization do not seem to be effective. This could mean that personal profiling of human resource practitioners during the recruitment and selection process that includes an evaluation of their inclination towards cynicism, passive coping strategies and external locus of control might be an effective intervention to predict performance, seeing that this research indicates that such attributes are considered work relevant requirements. The Human Resource Role Assessment Survey (Ulrich, 1997) can be utilised as measurement of the contribution of human resource practitioners towards organisational effectiveness during such interventions.

Interventions that are aimed at improvement of perceived performance of human resource practitioners should include the measurement and prevention of cynicism levels and potential causes thereof. Job requirements and job resources that can potentially lead to cynicism should be monitored and addressed before it causes depersonalisation and unwillingness to perform at expected levels. It is further recommended that interventions to improve human resource practitioner wellness and performance as well as future research in this organisation should be designed to confirm the actual effect of job resources on human resource practitioner wellness. The Workaholism Scale can be used to predict work-wellness issues under human resource practitioners with the objective to develop and implement interventions that are focused on prevention of burnout and decreased work engagement. Line customers should also be made aware that the quality of the service they receive from

human resource practitioners is directly influenced by line managers' attitude towards the status of the human resource function (O'Brian et al., 2004).

The organisation should also take note of the potential mediating effect of workaholism on work-wellness and be sensitive not to excessively promote workaholism. Previous studies (McMillan et al., 2002) state that workaholism is caused by organisations that support and reward workaholic behaviours, especially as they become more entrepreneurial (Burke, 2001). Employees who work long hours in such organisations are viewed as dedicated and committed, and technology that reinforces workaholic behaviours is provided by the organisation to enable workaholics to continue with work-related activities while not at work. This study confirmed that workaholic tendencies under human resource practitioners are valued by the organisation, but also provides support for the stance of Beulens and Poelmans (2004) and Ersoy-Kart (2005), who consider workaholism sometimes to be a manifestation of wellness issues rather than a positive work attitude. It is suggested that organisations should be cautioned against promoting workaholic tendencies by human resource practitioners, as it emerged from this study that workaholism is related to burnout which is related to inadequate performance. This implies that promoting workaholism might inhibit rather than facilitate achievement of organisational objectives and work wellness in the longer term.

5.3.2 Recommendations for future research

The findings of this study hold some important implications for future research. Based on the results obtained in this study, future studies should make use of larger and more representative samples. Other petrochemical organisations should also be involved in such studies to verify whether the results of the study can be generalised and to confirm the conclusions stated in the discussion of the research results regarding the personal profile and coping mechanisms of human resource practitioners. Future research should also attempt to confirm the conclusions stated in the discussion of the research results regarding the utilisation of the workaholism scale for explaining and predicting human resource practitioner performance.

Another question that should be investigated during future research is whether internal customers are expecting each human resource generalist to deliver exceptional results in terms of all the roles suggested by Ulrich (1997). If that is the case, role expectations might

not be realistic, since it is very unlikely that individuals will be able to be experts in all these areas simultaneously, which might have a negative influence on the work wellness of human resource personnel.

This organisation uses forced ranking to ensure that performance ratings are normally distributed. Qualitative follow-up interviews with participants revealed a high level of discomfort with the forced ranking philosophy, which could have distorted responses. The influence of this on perceptions of performance levels of should be investigated during future studies.

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