

THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF HR THROUGH GLOBAL STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT

There is a generic global framework that defines the personnel management body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is the cornerstone to the profession of HRM. Its content can be used across national boundaries: but only following appropriate analysis of the national context in which the framework is to be used. This is because although the commonalities between the activities and standards of personnel practitioners between countries outweigh the differences, the differences can be crucial.

These are the key findings of a comprehensive research project for the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), following a survey of personnel management associations across 22 countries, supported by a substantial literature review of HR competencies and professional standards.

The study explored the debate surrounding the 'professionalism' of HR, including the sense of identity within its community, ethical codes of conduct, common standards of entry, the HR body of knowledge and requirements for education or training. Although limited to a survey of personnel management associations, the WFPMA project established evidence of the existence of each of these aspects to differing degrees.

One of the key findings was that despite commonalities, there are important issues of national context which will influence the skills and knowledge required in terms of both technical and strategic HR competencies, such as national systems of legislation, economic wealth and labour markets, as well as HR professional representation.

Despite these variations, the study has proven that there is a generic body of knowledge which has been represented as a Global Framework of Skills and Knowledge. This framework enables practising HR professionals to identify the competencies they require given the context in which they are working. This is a significant finding in the development of professionalism of personnel management around the world, and this Framework will continue to be developed.

KEYWORDS

1. HRM
2. professionalism
3. competencies
4. standards
5. national context
6. personnel management associations
7. survey

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1 INTRODUCTION

There is a generic global framework that defines the personnel management body of knowledge. This body of knowledge is the cornerstone to the profession of HRM. Its content can be used across national boundaries: but only following appropriate analysis of the national context in which the framework is to be used. This is because although the commonalities between the activities and standards of personnel practitioners between countries outweigh the differences, the differences can be crucial. Each country will need to draw on the generic body of knowledge and define its own strategy for the development of personnel management practitioners to meet the challenges of the changing environment at individual, functional, organisational, sectoral, national and international levels.

These are the key findings of a comprehensive research project for the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations (WFPMA), carried out by Cranfield School of Management in the UK, and commissioned by the Institute of Personnel and Development (UK). The original question was whether an international set of professional standards could be developed for HR, or whether the idiosyncrasies at the national level were too great to permit this. This two-year study has addressed these issues through a literature review and surveys of HR professional associations, academics and practitioners in 28 countries across Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America. Due to the nature of the project, it has been managed by an international Steering Group, which provided feedback at each stage of development of the work.

The specific research questions that the project was designed to address were:

1. How do different countries define the standards for what constitutes an HR professional? What are the competencies they will need to be able to apply at the various levels of their professional activities, from the operational to the most strategic?
2. How do national associations certify the attainment of professional standards? What are the learning and development routes they might pursue in order to keep up-to-date those competencies?
3. Are there generic standards of professionalism in HR common to all or many countries? What are the professional standards that might be appropriate to certify the attainment of those competencies?
4. Could standards be expressed in such a way that they would be helpful to emerging professional associations wishing to develop HR professionalism in their country?

2 HR AS A PROFESSION

There is a body of literature that centres on the debate about whether HR can be classed as a 'profession'. Our review starts with a very bold statement from Losey in the USA that "human resource management is a profession" (1997, pp.147). He justifies this by stating that there is an established body of knowledge that can be taught, learned and tested, and that there is an ethical code of conduct. However, Ulrich & Eichinger claim that: "HR must become more professional" (1998, pp.1). They argue that HR *should* be a 'profession', but that it has not reached that status yet. There is a need for an accepted and commonly known body of knowledge, common standards for entry and performance, standards of conduct, sets of best practices and communities with strong identities and distinctiveness. And in order to achieve this, further study needs to be conducted into the body of knowledge that defines the discipline. In turn, this will then require additional training, testing and certification. In addition, they say that the route to professionalism is through the definition and gaining of competencies. They claim that this has been achieved to a large extent throughout the 1990s in the US already, but that this work should now be taken forward to create a common professional knowledge. Ulrich (1997) also makes the point that the HR profession should be based on essential competencies and clear roles for practitioners. These are obviously some of the key issues that this project has been designed to address: what is the body of knowledge, the set of core competencies and how can these be disseminated and taught?

However, the definition of 'professional' provided by Gibb (1994) in the UK includes one of the key differentiating elements of professionalism: the need to be qualified in order to practise in addition to having a specific body of knowledge and an ethical

code of conduct. If we consider this definition, the conclusion must be that HR is not a 'profession'. Although there is a perceived need to be qualified in certain countries or more specifically, certain organisations, this is not a statutory requirement in any country as it is for example for people in the medical or accounting professions. For example, we believe that in the USA, organisations are not allowed to state that a personnel qualification is required in job advertisements, as it has not yet been proven to be a requirement related to performance. In fact, only one quarter of senior HR managers in Europe has specific HR qualifications and/or is a member of their country's professional association¹, disputing the existence of a community with a strong identity and a need to be certified.

Walker (1988) argues from another perspective that "HR people have got to stop conceptualising their role as a 'professional' individual contributor and realise that their job is to help provide corporations with leadership on HR issues". And likewise, Boyatzis (Yeung 1996) believes that HR practitioners have been trying to create a sense of being a profession since the 1960s. He sees this as a damaging process. He claims that the 'profession' ends up with current, politically popular definitions of quality justifying its existence, and by definition is creating an element of exclusion of anything which diverges from the accepted professional body of knowledge. He argues that in the process of defining this appropriate body of knowledge and the required skills set, the level of performance achieved becomes 'average' or 'mediocre' rather than setting 'superior' performance targets. Likewise in the report on a survey carried out by the Institute of Personnel Management in New Zealand in 1997, it is stated that "it is irrelevant whether HR is a profession: what matters is whether HR practitioners behave in a professional manner" (Pajo & Cleland 1997, pp. 5).

The debate seems to be, in part, between different visions of professionalism. If we are to take the strictest elements of each of the definitions of professionalism presented here, the professionalism of HR can be summarised as requiring:

- a community with a strong sense of identity;
- an ethical code of conduct;
- common standards of entry and performance;
- a distinct body of knowledge
- a set of core competencies;
- a requirement for training and certification.

Although the extent to which the debate over "professionalism" is a valuable one may be questioned, in the context of this project it is important in order to establish worldwide HR competencies and standards. One means of assessing the extent of HR professionalism is to take a look at evidence of HR practitioners' career paths. The longer individuals choose to remain within a work domain and the more often the senior specialists are drawn from current practitioners, the more that domain can be classed as a profession. Longer service and the restriction of senior positions to those with training and experience imply that the body of knowledge grows, and the sense of identity and distinctiveness increases.

The careers of HR specialists indicate a number of different patterns. In 1999, the average number of years' experience of senior HR practitioners is high (thirteen) across Europe, ranging from six years in Denmark to seventeen years in Italy and Sweden. In Europe, over three-quarters of all senior HR managers have been an HR specialist for a minimum of five years, with one in five having worked in HR for over twenty years and in their organisation for a similar period of time. Also, on average six out of ten senior HR managers are recruited from amongst HR specialists (either from internal or external sources) though this figure is lower in for example Finland and Austria (four out of ten)². In New Zealand, a similar picture can be found, but it highlights that the phenomenon of HR people having started their career in HR is greatest amongst younger practitioners, indicating a changing trend over time (Pajo & Cleland 1997).

Despite the general trend of prolonged periods of time as HR specialists, and recruitment of HR practitioners being made mainly from those with HR experience, it remains that in Europe more than three in ten senior HR specialists are appointed from outside the profession. The career paths of senior HR specialists are not uniform among countries though. For example, HR specialists in the Philippines tend to come from and move on into different management functions. German, Slovakian, Spanish and UK HR specialists wanting to stay within HR feel they need general management skills in order to do this (Ackerman et al 1995).

¹ This figure is taken from CRANET 1992, the last time this question was asked in the CRANET survey (see Appendix 1). The questions in each round of the survey are amended to take into account current activities in the field of HRM.

² CRANET survey 1999.

Having explored the issue of professionalism in general in the literature, the first proposition of the research to establish common professional standards can be stated as:

Proposition 1: *There is a sense of community amongst HR practitioners that is supported by an ethical code of conduct and common standards of entry and performance.*

3 THE BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

An analysis of HR competencies requires careful definition because of the considerable variance in the use of the term 'competencies' in the literature. For the purpose of this study, the numerous definitions of competency can be summarised effectively as a collection of technical and cultural capabilities (Brockbank 1997). However, it is obvious throughout the literature that different authors advocate different approaches to competency definition. For example, one particular approach to modelling competencies advocated by Ulrich et al (1995) and Boyatzis (Yeung 1996) includes the integration of areas of competence into groupings.

Ulrich et al's (1995) model combines various aspects of competence into three primary elements: knowledge of the business, HR functional expertise and management of change. They argue that management of change is critical, as the organisation's external rate of change (e.g. globalisation, information flow, customer expectations, technology, etc.) must be matched by the internal rate of change for the organisation to remain competitive. Irrespective of job role or job title, the elements of competence remain in the same order of importance, with any variation manifesting itself in weighting alone. In the US, 'change management' has been reported to be the most important competence (41%), followed by 'HR functional expertise' (22%) and 'Knowledge of business' (17%). A similar pattern was also seen in non-US organisations, however the different elements were seen as being much more balanced: 34%, 26% and 26% respectively (Ulrich et al 1995, pp.487).

In defining HR competencies, Ulrich and Boyatzis, like many others, also argue that it is necessary to consider the specific job roles of HR practitioners in order to differentiate between possible variations in requirements. The roles of human resource staff have been extensively discussed in the literature and in textbooks of human resource management (see, for example, Schuler and Huber, 1993; Purcell, 1995). One work in particular by Tyson and Fell (1986) defined three dominant personnel management models based on an analogy from the building and civil engineering profession: clerk of works, contracts manager and architect. In essence, the clerk of works role focuses on the day-to-day operations carried out by the personnel department, and is often the support or administrative HR practitioner role. The contracts manager is the expert ensuring that every aspect of policy and procedure and hence the personnel department's 'contract' with the organisation is fulfilled. This role equates to that of the professional or specialist HR practitioner. The architect is the long-term designer and planner, co-ordinating the activities of other members of the department, otherwise known as the senior or strategic management HR practitioner. In the definition of these models it is already clear how individuals carrying out different models of personnel management will require different degrees of competence in different areas. This is also relative to the environment in which the organisation is operating.

Traditionally, HR staff have had a relatively limited involvement in the organisation's affairs and goals, with activities being targeted mainly at the operational level. Consequently, the justification of the presence of human resource staff is mainly to enjoy economies of scale and specialisation. However, the HR function is currently having to respond to major changes in its environment: lowering costs, enhancing quality, ensuring that the organisation is tapping into the full potential of its employees and creating stronger business links, hence becoming a business partner. With the growing importance of human resource management to the success of the organisation, human resource departments have become involved at the medium-term level (for example, in the development of recruitment marketing plans) and at the strategic level (for example, a relocation of the organisation). The challenge for the future for HR appears to lie in sustaining a balance between strategist and technical roles, and shifting from being a provider to being an enabler in personnel management. This includes facilitating change and being an innovator in the face of change and may involve the use of core HR staff whilst outsourcing appropriate activities and devolving responsibilities to the line and to employees themselves (Bell et al 1999). One means of achieving the appropriate balance is to focus on the 'deliverables' of the HR function, rather than the activities (Ulrich 1997). This makes the development of an HR competency model based on behavioural outcomes an appropriate way of shifting this emphasis.

The HR functions' contribution to organisational performance can be seen from the perspective of the HR practitioner him or herself, and that of the line manager. Many HR activities can be implemented by either human resource management specialists or by line managers provided the individuals have the appropriate levels of competence. On average across Europe, three out of

ten organisations have increased responsibilities of the line for HRM³. The most common responsibility devolved is for training and development (43% of organisations across Europe), followed by recruitment and selection (35%), pay and benefits (29%), workforce expansion/reduction (28%), with the lowest being industrial relations issues (23%). This information should influence our analysis of future competency needs of HR practitioners.

Concentrating on HR's direct influence on the organisation, Ulrich et al (1995) carried out a large-scale survey in the US looking at specific competencies in HR in order to produce benchmarking standards. One of the recent developments which they identified was the emergence of HR 'business partners' resulting in a need for the professional growth of HR practitioners themselves, and the need to contribute to the organisation's competitive stance as a whole. Ulrich et al define competence as the ability to add value to the business; competence must focus on the process leading from changing business conditions to achieving sustainable competitive advantage. This can be done by generating sources of uniqueness and hence developing unique organisational capability. And fundamental to this is ensuring that HR practices are central to the creation and maintenance of this organisational capability.

Having looked at definitions of competencies and considered the importance of job roles and models of personnel management to competency definition, this leads us to the second proposition of the research:

Proposition 2: *There is a distinct HR body of knowledge that can be applied across job roles and models of personnel management.*

4 DEVELOPING AN HR COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Initially, although we note that some of the literature casts doubts on the value of developing prescriptive competency models for HR (see for example Gibb 1994), there is a large body of HR literature that argues the need to develop a competency model. The reasons cited are in order to audit the current skills gap and to provide appropriate development to ensure the function is able to add value. Such a competency model can either be developed based on senior management input (subjective approach) or on a conceptual framework such as functional analysis (objective approach). A number of surveys have already been carried out around the world to try to build such a conceptual framework using both the subjective and objective approaches (Schoonover 1998, Csoka & Hackett 1998, Heneman et al 1998, Laabs 1996, Lawson & Limbrick 1996 and Walker 1988). These also include work done by companies (e.g. UPS, Unilever) and by the personnel management associations in a number of countries around the world. According to these studies, the core HR competencies can be divided into four broad areas: individual style, organisational involvement, leadership and technical activities.

Style focuses particularly on personal credibility. Tyson & Fell (1986) define this as resulting from experience across the range of HR competencies, including expertise in the academic disciplines that provide the theoretical basis. Other competencies that develop individual style include interpersonal effectiveness and a relationship orientation. It also includes personal strengths such as tolerance for stress, change and ambiguity as well as being able to adopt creative and analytical approaches to problem solving.

The organisational involvement competencies refer to issues related to business acumen and market orientation. They focus on managing change and culture, having a strategic business perspective and being able to align HR with business and organisational planning processes. The ability to develop a learning organisation also falls under this heading.

The leadership role competencies are more about relationship management, facilitation and building. They focus on the various areas of organisational management such as project, assets, talent and information. Responsiveness to stakeholders is another key competency that also links back to the organisation awareness competencies. Issues such as quality and value are key words found amongst these competencies.

The technical competencies are perhaps the most familiar in the HR literature. These include the knowledge and delivery of traditional personnel and HR management, for example, reward and compensation, labour relations, training and development, organisational design, staffing and retention, performance management, communication, grievance and discipline. Emerging competencies in this area include the application and exploitation of information technology and compliance with increasingly complex legislation. Likewise, an emphasis is also starting to appear in the literature on skills in evaluating the HR function, on clear objective setting and on HR accountability.

³ CRANET survey 1999.

As we have indicated, this study adopts a broad definition of HR competencies, which is most appropriate to our purpose. It includes not only technical competencies in dealing with transactional tasks such as recruitment, retention, release, motivation and development of an organisation's employees, but also includes the strategic skills and knowledge required to deal with the personnel functions' staff and involvement in the organisation as a whole.

The literature is clear in dividing out these technical and strategic competencies required within HR. In the past, it is argued, the personnel function was about welfare and remuneration, but now it is centred on organisational reaction to changing environments with increases in globalisation and the use of technology and knowledge-based workers. This is affecting the technical competency requirements of personnel practitioners and it is also having an impact on where the personnel function fits into the organisation as a whole. The literature clearly states that Personnel should be taking a more strategic role within organisations, and there is research evidence that this is actually taking place. In Europe, the number of organisations with the head of Personnel on the top management board (or equivalent) has been around 60% for the last decade, with the proportion of organisations with a personnel department at around 95%. The number of organisations with a written personnel strategy increased on average by 12% over the last decade⁴. This amounts to evidence of the increased strategic approach to HR across Europe, and similar evidence can be seen in literature from the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

We have identified that the literature specifies some core strategic and technical competencies which belong to the HR discipline, therefore our third proposition is as follows:

Proposition 3: *A core model of strategic and technical HR competencies can be defined the elements of which can be used to determine job roles.*

5 REQUIREMENT FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Having established details of the broad body of knowledge regarding HR practices from which a competency model can be developed, it is important to consider how the transfer of skills and knowledge to HR practitioners can take place to ensure added value in the organisation. It is also important to establish to what extent this body of knowledge is tested and certified, and has become a requirement in the working environment.

Considering first the education levels of senior HR practitioners across Europe, almost three-quarters of senior HR practitioners have an academic degree⁵. However, there is a large difference in the proportion that have a university first degree between countries, ranging from four out of ten in the Netherlands to over nine out of ten in Turkey, Spain, France and Bulgaria. It is important to consider the influence of the national context as we shall discuss later in greater depth, and particularly the national education system when considering statistics such as these. For example, France is well known for its requirement on people to have achieved as highly as possible in educational terms before starting their career in whatever occupation. The percentage of senior HR managers in France with a degree is thus correspondingly high (91%).

We discussed earlier the emerging requirement for HR practitioners to adopt business knowledge, and correspondingly, in the 1990s, the academic disciplines of senior HR managers across Europe reflect this emphasis on the business studies and economics areas of study. The divisions amongst disciplines of study are shown in Table 1.

1 Table 1: Academic disciplines of senior HR managers (%)

Discipline	1992	1995	1999
Business studies/economics	34	40	37
Social sciences	19	20	21
Humanities/arts	11	9	9
Law	14	12	13
Engineering	8	8	9
Natural Sciences	4	3	3
Other	10	8	8

⁴ Trend data from 1992 to 1999 from the CRANET survey.

⁵ CRANET survey 1999.

Source: CRANET (1992, 1995, 1999)

There are also different patterns in educational profiles of senior HR specialists between certain European countries. For example, in Spain a degree in law is more common, whereas degrees in social sciences are more common in Sweden and arts/humanities in the UK (Tyson & Wikander 1994). Again this is an example of how national context can have an impact on HR specialist training and education that cannot be ignored in a study of this nature. Any Europe-wide educational programme has to be sufficiently flexible to take into account different educational systems, to meet specific country needs and to prepare managers to work at the strategic level. Taking the argument on a worldwide scale inevitably exaggerates this point.

With regard to job-related training, there is a great deal of consensus across Europe regarding the method of training received by senior HR practitioners from their employer for their personnel management role. In Europe, short courses and seminars are the most popular method with an average of eight out of ten respondents having received training via this route (the highest being Norway with 95%, and the lowest Portugal with only 50%). Job-related projects was second most popular at around half (highest Austria 84%, lowest France 22%), then job rotation for three out of ten practitioners (highest Turkey 39%, lowest Portugal 10%), formal coaching for two out of ten (highest Denmark 34%, lowest Czech Republic 4%) and the least popular being formal mentoring, available to only one in ten (highest Greece 37%, lowest Czech Republic 3%)⁶. As the figures in brackets show however, country variations are highly significant. Although we can see that much training is done off-the-job via short courses and seminars, there is still a very significant proportion taking place on-the-job (e.g. job-related projects, job rotation, coaching and mentoring).

However, very little appears to be available within the HR competencies' literature to show how practitioners should aim to enhance their skill and knowledge levels. Most journal articles are content to list the required competencies for the future and suggest practitioners act on the gap they see between their own skills and what is required (for the exceptions, see Yeung et al 1996 and Yeung 1996).

Having discussed how HR practitioners are educated and trained in relevant competencies, we have inevitably touched on the broader context, and how these competencies can vary by country. This leads us to our fourth proposition:

Proposition 4: *HR practitioners need to be trained and educated in the core competencies defined according to the context in which they operate.*

6 NATIONAL CONTEXT

Throughout the literature it is argued that context influences the required competencies for HR practice. The nature and degree of variation is, however, open to discussion. The basic idea that management may be different in different countries only really gained credence some thirty years ago, based on studies such as those done by Hofstede (1980) and Weinshall (1977). Until then, there was considered to be 'one best way', which led to the implicit assumption of universal management homogeneity. By carrying out this cross-national study, it has enabled macro-contextual factors that make up the fundamental environment in which HR is operating to be taken into consideration. It is therefore important to try to find out and to understand what is contextually unique and why (Brewster, 1999). Although, there is an increasing shift towards globalisation, and hence arguably towards convergence, in a global project as this is, it is still essential to consider national variations in the definition of HR competencies and professional standards.

Sparrow and Hiltrop (1997) divide the national context into four sets of factors: culture, institutionalisation, business structures/systems, and roles/competence of practitioners. They explain, for example, how organisations face different legal and regulatory systems, depending on the country of residence. These systems vary immensely between countries (see also Brewster & Hegewisch, 1994). Furthermore, differences in economic wealth and labour markets are large between countries.

Legal and regulatory systems, economic wealth, the functioning of labour markets, and culture, all affect requirements of HR competencies. Examples can be easily given. In some countries, the consequences of not abiding by laws on discrimination may have major financial consequences for the organisation (in the United States, for instance). In others, this may not be so significant. In some countries, laws on discrimination are very comprehensive, whereas in other countries these laws are used in fewer areas: in the UK, Italy and in the Netherlands, the use of age restrictions while recruiting is not against the law. As a

⁶ CRANET survey 1992 – the last time this question was asked.

result, in Italy, about half of all advertisements explicitly state age requirements. In the Netherlands, about 20% of all vacancies explicitly use age requirements. In contrast, in the United States, the use of age restrictions is seen as a discriminatory practice. Equally, legislation in Europe is generally stricter than in the US regarding issues of health and safety, working time and employee consultation. Hence, in countries where there are higher legislative demands on the employment of labour, HR employees need to have a more fundamental knowledge of employment law.

Economic wealth may influence the use of HR competencies, since the use of fringe benefits (for example, pensions or healthcare) seems to be more common in wealthy countries. This suggests that in wealthy countries, a higher proportion of HR staff must be specialised in the running of benefit schemes. In addition, wealthy countries tend to spend more resources on training, so in these countries, more specialised training staff are needed. For example, in 1999, Sweden and Norway were amongst the countries in Europe with the highest spend on employee development in terms of the percentage of annual salary bill, whilst Spain, Italy, Portugal and the Czech Republic were amongst the countries with the lowest spend⁷.

National culture affects the use of HR competencies, though since this is an indistinct concept, it is difficult to identify exactly how it does so. For example, it has been claimed that it is useful to focus on national specific differences in the following dimensions: (1) emphasis on quality of life, (2) formalisation and standardisation of work organisation, (3) whether tasks prevail over relationships and (4) the subordinate/boss relationship (Schuler and Rogovsky, 1998). It may be hypothesised, for example, that in societies where formalisation and standardisation of work organisation are more appreciated, HR staff are more likely to work to maintain the status quo. However, in countries where formalisation and standardisation of work is less appreciated, HR staff are seen more as agents of change. Equally, in more consultative societies, HR staff are perhaps more likely to be seen as experts if they can manage the consultation processes effectively. Cultural differences can also be seen, for example, in attitudes and definitions of what makes an effective manager, feedback, power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

National differences in labour markets and the current type of labour market (e.g. many vacancies and a shortage of skills, current levels of unemployment, etc.) will affect the perceived nature of HR competencies. For example, one of the main differences between national labour markets is job turnover. Well-known examples are that in the United States job turnover is high; whereas in Japan, job turnover has traditionally been low compared to European countries. Hence, in the United States, the skills needed to recruit may be more common than in Japan. Similarly, job turnover is usually higher in economies that are booming than those that are in a depression. Cyclical variation in HR competencies is therefore to be expected. Another interesting example is job rotation. In countries where job turnover is relatively low and organisations are not expected to lay off employees, job rotation is more common. Usually, HR departments are responsible for job rotation. Clearly, to make job rotation a success, HR departments should have in-depth knowledge of the organisation and should have the power to overcome the objections of individual line managers. Hence, in countries where job rotation is very common (for example, Japan), HR employees must have the skills (and authority) to organise this.

Earlier we identified the distinction between different models of personnel management: clerk of works, contracts manager and architect (Tyson and Fell, 1986) and how this relates to strategic and technical competencies. Amongst the strategic HR competencies required by the architect role are the skills necessary to integrate human resource management with the overall business strategy. For example, a strategic HR skill is to know which type of contracts are offered to employees (permanent contracts or temporary contracts), or whether the organisation should offer more or less training to its employees. Strategic HR competencies are by definition more difficult to acquire since they are less theoretical and require more on-the-job experience. In addition, strategic HR competencies are especially valuable if accompanied by an in-depth knowledge of the organisation. This makes strategic HR competencies more idiosyncratic than technical HR competencies which are presumably easier to transfer to other organisations.

In a number of countries, technical HR competencies are nowadays relatively easy to acquire, although this was not necessarily the case a number of decades ago. For example, in the United States, most organisations are able to hire employees with the required skills to recruit. However, in these countries, strategic HR competencies are still scarce. Hence, it is not surprising that empirical studies have shown that organisations in the United States emphasise the importance of strategic HR competencies and not those of technical HR competencies. Nevertheless, in other countries, the 'markets' for technical HR competencies may be less developed. In these countries, organisations can still attempt to obtain a (short-lived) competitive advantage by improving the technical HR competencies, whereas the strategic HR competencies will receive less attention. Since technical HR competencies are easier to acquire, it makes sense for organisations to focus first on technical HR competencies before

⁷ CRANET data 1999.

focusing on strategic HR competencies. For the same reasons, in countries where technical HR competencies cannot be used any more to obtain a competitive advantage, on-the-job experience will be emphasised as being desirable. Whereas in countries where technical HR competencies can still give additional value compared to competitors, these competencies will still be relatively more valuable.

Given the discussion in the literature of the importance of the national context to the working environment, our fifth proposition is as follows:

Proposition 5: *Any global model of HR competencies must take account of national context in its implementation.*

7 OTHER CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

Within the national context in which HR practitioners operate, a more immediate influence is that of the specific organisation. Various theories support the notion that similar organisations tend to make use of similar HR competencies. This can be explained by considering how an organisation feels the pressure to conform with the expectations of its stakeholders to introduce business measures of interest to these stakeholders. Since the expectations of these stakeholders tend to be the same for all organisations, similar measures spread throughout the population of organisations. In addition, due to competition, organisations that under-perform will be under the threat of take-over or bankruptcy. Thus, due to competition between organisations, beneficial measures spread throughout the population, which is of course reflected in organisations' use of similar HR competencies.

Nevertheless, when the effect of HR activities on the overall performance of the organisation is small, these organisations may, for an extensive period, use less, or more, HR competencies than would be optimal from a maximising-performance principle. In addition, the expectations of stakeholders with respect to HR competencies may not be well formulated. This can arise, for example, from the absence of benchmark information. Consequently, in countries in which HR activities are more relevant to the performance of the organisation, and in countries where HR activities receive less attention in the media (and hence less benchmark information is available), the variation in the use of HR competencies may be much larger than in other countries.

The organisational context in which an organisation is operating has also been proven to affect the degree to which certain competencies are required. This may depend on the organisation's size, ownership, industry sector, geography or degree of globalisation. For example, an organisation undergoing increased globalisation may be required to focus on increasing workforce commitment, dealing with conflicting local and parent company practices, developing effective global leaders and optimising organisational synergy (Brockbank 1997). These activities may involve the HR practitioners having to acquire new sets of skills and knowledge. However, Ulrich et al (1995) argues that such factors have little overall influence on the fundamental elements of competency required.

Another aspect of the organisational context is that of potential outsourcing of HR activities. Although most large organisations have a human resource department that performs transactional HR activities, operational activities do not have to be performed necessarily within the hierarchy of the organisation: they can be outsourced to the market. One of the most fundamental decisions of an organisation is to decide whether to make a product or to buy it in the market, i.e. outsource it. Organisations tend to buy the product from the market when the product is standardised and this market is developed. Technical HR competencies are relatively standard. As a result, recruitment, wage administration and general training skills can be outsourced to the market. In general, organisations specialising in recruitment, wage administration or general training will be able to offer these activities at lower costs than if organisations organise these HR activities in-house.

In countries where the markets for HR activities are more developed, it is unlikely that organisations will report difficulties in acquiring employees with technical HR competencies because technical HR activities are more likely to be outsourced. Similarly, in these countries, HR employees (working for organisations that do not specialise in HR) are more likely to concentrate on HR activities that are more firm-specific or that require knowledge of a combination of HR activities. The extent to which outsourcing is prevalent in a country is therefore of importance when considering the skills and knowledge required by practitioners working in HR departments or those working in specialised agencies.

It is interesting to observe however, that in the literature on HR competencies, most empirical studies focus on HR departments in (large) organisations, and not on specialist agencies providing HR services. Since in some countries outsourcing of HR activities has become important, and in other countries it is growing quickly, there is currently a large gap in the literature. The

demand for HR competencies in organisations with HR departments is quite different from the demand for HR competencies in agencies that specialise in HR activities.

Another element of context worthy of description is that of time. The primary comment regarding the change in competency requirements over time, particularly in the US, Australian and UK literature is the increasing importance of business knowledge, and in particular, financial management. This appears to be acquiring a particular interest in organisations, especially where senior-level HR practitioners have a place on the main board of management.

Equally, as time progresses, so certain management techniques and processes come in and out of fashion: changing the focus of HR practices. For example, the relatively recent phenomenon of outsourcing described above demands new technical competencies. In another example, in the 1980s business skills and knowledge of the work environment were already important factors in the effectiveness of HR Trainer/Developer roles in the UK. This was starting to appear increasingly in US literature on the topic, but had not pervaded Australian literature at all at that time (Moy 1991).

Other causes of variation in HR competencies depend on such things as the level of decentralisation, strategic integration and HR careers and professional allegiance (Ackerman et al 1995), all of which can be analysed within national, organisational and time contexts. However, these and other variations in HR competency requirements are all predicated by the fundamental purpose of the HR function, which is seen as being to contribute to the success of the organisation as a whole.

These various contextual factors formulate our final proposition:

Proposition 6: Awareness of context at organisational and job level, as well as the time period, is essential to the implementation of core HR competency models.

8 METHODOLOGY

In view of these propositions derived from the literature review, the project included carrying out three separate but related surveys. These included a worldwide survey of personnel management associations, a second follow-up survey in the USA, and a worldwide survey among academics in the field of Human Resource Management. Out of the 53 countries contacted in the main survey, 28 responded by either returning a personnel management association questionnaire, and/or returning an academic literature questionnaire. This gives an overall response rate of 53%.

For the main worldwide survey, we chose to use a postal survey that consisted of four sections. These sections gathered information about associations themselves (their differences and similarities such as size, membership, etc.), their provision of education and training programmes (including existing education levels, and formal and informal learning event provision), and the skill and knowledge requirements of personnel practitioners (for example, published guidelines, codes of conduct, differentiation of duties between job levels and roles).

The responsibility for the design of the survey was shared by a large number of academics and practitioners knowledgeable in the field of (international) human resource management. The authors and Dr Jos van Ommeren (Cranfield School of Management, the United Kingdom) took primary responsibility for the design of the questionnaire in close collaboration with Judy Whittaker (IPD, United Kingdom). Based on the first design of the questionnaire, the members of the Steering Group indicated improvements. The amended version of the questionnaire was mailed again to all the members of the Steering Group and the comments were incorporated into the final version. After the questionnaire had been designed in English, it was translated into Spanish.

A total of 70 questionnaires were posted on 5 January 1999 to 51 countries all over the world, primarily to the Head of the national Personnel Management Associations. The IPD administered the mailing lists and posted out the questionnaires. After the initial closing date for receipt of completed questionnaires, members of the research team at the Cranfield School of Management attempted to increase the response by telephone, fax and e-mail. We received a total of 23 completed questionnaires from the following 22 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States of America and Venezuela. The final date for receipt of completed questionnaires was set at 31 May 1999.

The response rate achieved from the WFPMA member associations was 31%, covering 41% of the countries contacted. The spread of responses from Personnel Management Associations around the world is good. Hence, we may presume that our sample of Personnel Management Associations is reasonably representative for Personnel Management Associations around the world.

A further ten shortened questionnaires were circulated amongst participants at a presentation of the project at the SHRM International Conference in Orlando, USA in April 1999. The questions posed are limited to those on education and training, which levels of personnel practitioners are responsible for which tasks, and the personal details of the respondents. The results of these questionnaires were checked against the SHRM response from the USA. To a large extent the results of this survey reinforced the data provided by the USA.

A total of 48 academic literature questionnaires were sent out to 27 countries worldwide, and all 70 recipients of the main survey were asked to pass on an academic literature questionnaire to a suitable academic representative in their country. We received 23 responses from a total of 20 countries.

An analysis of supplementary documentation supplied by associations in addition to survey responses provided rich detail for the second phase of the project, the development of the Global Framework of Skills and Knowledge. A number of examples were also identified of different mechanisms for delivering, assessing and certifying the attainment of professional standards.

One of the limitations to the generalisation of this study lies in its focus on personnel management associations rather than personnel practitioners themselves. Given the scope of the funding, this was inevitable in this instance, and has partly been addressed through an in-depth review of the literature. Further work would be required to expand the research into the workplaces of the many countries involved.

9 FINDINGS

The majority of associations have a combination of individual and organisational categories of membership (62%), with only two countries out of the 22 limiting membership to organisations (Mexico and Hungary). Membership of associations is restricted in the minority of cases. These restrictions are related to an individual's job experience (39 per cent), country of residence (twenty per cent), education level (eighteen per cent) or language/region (six per cent). For corporate membership, restrictions are placed in relation to location (country: fourteen per cent; region: seven per cent). Individual and corporate membership are not limited according to economic sector in any of the respondent countries. A large majority (73 per cent) of associations divides membership into different categories. On average, there are five categories of membership, based primarily on individual/organisation status, education levels and work experience.

In a project of this nature, the size of the associations obviously varies greatly from country to country. For example, the number of members of the associations in each country varies from 34 organisations to 114,000 individuals. The number of paid employees averages at nine, comprising seven full-time and two part-time staff. Canada is the only Association without paid employees.

Most countries have more than one association representing the interests of personnel practitioners (59 per cent). The majority of these focus either specifically on training and development or on general personnel management and training and development issues. Around one quarter of these other organisations are specific to a particular function of personnel management, such as employee relations or employee reward.

Across all of the countries, a very large majority of members is qualified to university degree level (85 per cent). Amongst these degrees, Business Studies was the most popular discipline for personnel management association members, followed by Psychology and then Law. Almost all (96 per cent) respondents believe that personnel management practitioners in their country were more likely to have a degree now than ten years ago. Three-quarters believe it is very important to have a university degree to practise personnel management, with the remainder seeing this as quite important. Very similar opinions are held with regard to the need to follow a course of study in personnel management.

Over half of all the associations who responded run professional personnel management certified courses of study and/or recognise those run by other institutions. In general, these courses are well established, with the average length of time that a course has been in existence being twenty years. Of these courses, over half differentiate between levels of competence. The average length of time taken to complete a certified course of study at elementary level is 114 hours, and at advanced level 216

hours. The total time taken to complete a certified course of study when there is no differentiation between levels is 292 hours, the longest courses taking up to three years. Almost three-quarters of the associations who responded offer different modes of study to their students, with the full-time option being the most popular. On average, 175 individuals pass the certified course of study each year, giving an average of 4,200 individuals who currently hold the course certificate per association. All who follow the certified courses of study are formally examined.

In addition to certified courses of study with formal examination, there are also other means of recognising competence in the field of personnel management. Over half of all respondents have a mechanism for awarding certificates for demonstrating competence in the field of professional personnel management rather than students having to sit an examination. A small minority of institutions, eight per cent, requires practitioners to undergo re-certification. There is a significant usage of continuing professional development requirements, being operated by over half of all associations (54 per cent). On average, 200 members gain some form of personnel management certificate each year. Approximately 111,500 Association members from 22 countries currently hold their Association's professional personnel management certificate.

Most associations offer training courses to both members and non-members. Few licence other institutions to run training courses (six per cent), but over half also recognise training courses offered by other institutions. On average, some 550 individuals per association (a total of over 51,000 individuals a year in 22 countries) participates in training and development courses and programmes offered. The training courses offered cover the whole spectrum of personnel management issues throughout most countries.

About half of the associations define or publish guidelines on the skills and knowledge required for personnel management activities and responsibilities (53 per cent). Like the range of training courses offered by associations, these guidelines cover the whole spectrum of personnel management activities, with recruitment and selection being quoted by most associations. In addition to the guidelines on skills and knowledge, over three-quarters of associations produce formal guidelines on a code of conduct for personnel management practitioners. A quarter of associations impose penalties for members failing to abide with any of these guidelines.

Looking at the activities of HR practitioners in different job roles, we found recruitment, retention, promotion and termination activities being carried out at all three levels: support/administrative, professional/specialist and senior/strategic management. Support/administrative staff are mainly responsible for administering recruitment activities, followed by administering promotion schemes and implementing induction programmes for new employees. Professional/specialist staff are responsible primarily for interviewing and selecting new employees, implement induction programmes for new employees and carrying out procedures for termination of employment. The key responsibility at senior/strategic management level is authorising recruitment budgets and staffing levels, followed by formulating a corporate resourcing strategy.

Performance measurement, reward and development activities are also divided amongst the three practitioner levels. Support/administrative and professional/specialist staff take equal responsibility for administering reward and benefits schemes. Professional/specialist staff are also responsible for delivering training, carrying out performance appraisals, deciding on training activities and methods and administering job evaluation schemes. Senior/strategic management staff develop employee training strategies, determine the levels of reward and benefits and develop corporate reward strategies.

The third category of activity covers the areas of employee communication and the working environment. Aside from supporting the welfare of individuals, support/administrative level practitioners were not seen as responsible for many of these activities. Professional/specialist level practitioners are mainly responsible for developing information systems, providing advice to other functions on employment law and supporting the welfare of individual employees. Senior/strategic management level staff responsibilities include developing an employee relations strategy, developing an internal communications policy and managing culture change programmes.

A number of activities were expressed as not being applicable to the personnel management function by one or more countries. These include implementing equal opportunities programmes (23 per cent), developing personnel management information systems (fourteen per cent), evaluating the personnel management function (nine per cent), monitoring health and safety policy implementation (nine per cent) and developing corporate reward strategies (nine per cent).

Based on the supplementary documentary information provided by survey respondents, an outline of the full range of potential competencies required by personnel management practitioners was constructed, and is represented in summary form in Table 2.

.1 Table 2: Global Framework of Skills and Knowledge

I. Personal	II. Organisational	III. Managerial	IV. Technical
I.1 Communication	II.1 Knowledge of the environment	III.1 Management of self	IV.1 HR planning & staffing
I.2 Decision making and problem solving	II.2 Knowledge of the industry/sector	III.2 Management of people	IV.2 Performance management & development
I.3 Business acumen	II.3 Knowledge of the organisation	III.3 Management of resources	IV.3 Employee & labour relations
I.4 Credibility & professionalism	II.4 Impact assessment	III.4 Management of operations, inc. outsourcing	IV.4 Compensation & benefits
I.5 Leadership	II.5 The HR department as a part of the organisation	III.5 Management of information	IV.5 Health, safety, welfare & security
I.6 Relationship management		III.6 Change management	IV.6 Systems & information management
I.7 Adaptability			IV.7 Organisational design & development

Further evidence of differences between associations is provided as a comparative study in Appendix 3.

10 DISCUSSION

The exploration through the study of the six propositions identified in the literature review will help to identify the extent of professionalism in the HR field around the globe. In turn, this will establish the extent to which we may talk about a ‘global’ framework of HR competencies and professional standards. We will take each proposition in turn to examine the evidence gathered.

Proposition 1: *There is a sense of community amongst HR practitioners that is supported by an ethical code of conduct and common standards of entry and performance.*

Personnel management associations around the globe vary greatly, for example, in size, but there are also many common features. Usually, they have a mixture of individual and organisational membership statuses with a minimum of restrictions being set on becoming a member. Regulation of membership types takes place through achievements, status and location. However, there do not appear to be common standards of entry across national boundaries. Most countries have more than one personnel management association covering similar if not the same interests, so the national co-ordination of activities is crucial to the enhancement of the credibility of personnel management as a profession.

The production of professional guidelines on personnel management activities is widespread across the world’s personnel management associations, and covers the whole spectrum of personnel management activities. The production of an ethical code of conduct is almost equally common (by over three-quarters of associations across the world), which is a clear indicator of the will to develop professionalism in personnel management standards. However, the fact that many areas of personnel management are covered by guidelines in less than half of the associations surveyed may indicate a gap in the setting of standards in some countries.

Therefore, we have evidence of the sense of community amongst HR practitioners, given the large number of professional bodies that have been established to represent them. The use of guidelines and ethical codes of conduct are also widespread, so our first proposition has been partially confirmed. However, there is no evidence of common standards or criteria of entry being in place between countries.

Proposition 2: *There is a distinct HR body of knowledge that can be applied across job roles and models of personnel management.*

Proposition 3: *A core model of strategic and technical HR competencies can be defined the elements of which can be used to determine job roles.*

The information gathered from the survey of job roles and levels, and from the document search, provides evidence of the existence of a global body of knowledge. This is supported by academic and practitioner literature. This body of knowledge is based on the principles of HRM, as well as covering personal, organisational and managerial skills and knowledge sets. This is one of the least disputed aspects of the professionalism of HR, and as such confirms our second and third propositions.

Proposition 4: *HR practitioners need to be trained and educated in the core competencies defined according to the context in which they operate.*

In order to be classed as a profession, one of the key criteria identified was the need to be trained and certified in HR competencies. The findings show an apparent rise in the importance of gaining a personnel management qualification, compared with the findings of the Cranet survey in 1992 reported in the literature review. In 1992, only a quarter of senior HR managers had specific HR qualifications, compared to the majority of associations seeing this as very important for HR practitioners in general. However, there is no legislative or regulatory requirement for an HR practitioner to be certified in order to practice in any of the 22 countries which participated in the survey. There is also a lack of evidence in the literature of any variance in effectiveness of certified and non-certified HR practitioners in the workplace. The compulsory element of proposition four therefore must be rejected on these grounds.

Proposition 5: *Any global model of HR competencies must take account of national context in its implementation.*

Proposition 6: *Awareness of context at organisational and job level, as well as the time period, is essential to the implementation of core HR competency models.*

One of the key findings of the study is the importance of studying context (national, organisational, job role) in considering HR competencies. Before being able to determine the appropriate set of skills and knowledge required by HR practitioners doing a particular job at a particular level in a particular organisation in a particular country, it is essential to consider the whole environment in which this individual is working. Without this, there is a risk of reaching inappropriate solutions for the country, organisation or job for which the skill and knowledge requirements are being defined. This leads to the confirmation of propositions five and six.

11 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have explored the professionalism of personnel management on a global scale, incorporating an examination of the substantial extant literature, along with results of the WFPMA Global HR Competencies and Professional Standards surveys.

The literature offered a substantial contribution to our understanding of worldwide HR competencies and professional standards. The review uncovered quite a debate on the 'professionalism' of HR, which essentially revolved around the question of the criteria for defining a profession. We studied this debate examining the issues of the sense of identity within the HR community, its ethical code of conduct, common standards of entry to the profession, the HR body of knowledge, and the requirement for education or training within the profession.

Opinions in the literature vary from the positive to the negative regarding the current state of professionalism. From the study, we identified that many of the criteria for HR to be classed as a professional occupation have been met on a global scale. The areas of weakness identified centre primarily on common standards of entry to the profession, and a lack of requirement to be certified in the field. The fundamental requirement for a defined and established body of knowledge was addressed. Although limited to a survey of personnel management associations, the WFPMA project established the existence of such a generic global framework defining the personnel management body of knowledge.

The study highlighted the importance of analysing the context in which a practitioner is operating to ensure that the appropriate

elements of the frameworks are applied. Variations in the core competencies and in methods of training and certification were considered based on three important broad contexts: national, organisational and time. We examined the impact of national systems of legislation, economic wealth and labour markets, as well as HR professional representation, on the activities of HR practitioners. The findings proved that variance can influence significantly the skills and knowledge required in terms of both technical and strategic competencies, and the impact which HR has within an organisation.

In examining this HR body of knowledge, we provided our own definition of competencies, encapsulating both technical and strategic knowledge and skills. Competency was identified as one of the key enabling factors for an organisation to create its own sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace or, in the public service sector, for the delivery of cost-effective services. The underlying purpose of the practice of HRM was clarified as adding value to the organisation, which could be achieved via two routes: through line management or external contractors carrying out HR activities, and through HR practitioners themselves. Each of these approaches will affect the skill requirements within an organisation, and of individual practitioners whether they are working in an HR function or a specialised agency. This supported the idea that core competencies do not necessarily vary in nature but rather in focus or weighting given the context of different job roles and models of personnel management. The global framework of competencies of HRM is the starting point to identify a global set of core HR competencies that can be applied across national boundaries.

Despite these variations, the study has proven that there is a generic body of knowledge which has been represented as a Global Framework of Skills and Knowledge. This framework will enable practising HR professionals to identify the competencies they require given the context in which they are working. This is an important finding in the development of professionalism of personnel management around the world, and this Framework will continue to be developed to provide detailed guidelines to practitioners.

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13 APPENDIX 1: CRANET SURVEY

The data employed are based on the Cranfield Surveys on International HRM carried out in 1992, 1995 and 1999. The CRANET-G Network collects the Cranfield survey data. This network is a global network of over thirty prestigious business schools, one in each country, that collaborate to conduct joint research and development, education and training in the field of HRM in Europe. The Centre for European HRM at Cranfield School of Management co-ordinates the network. To date, well over thirty thousand organisational responses have been gathered. The countries included in the 1999 data collection round are UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Ireland, Portugal, Finland, Greece, Czech Republic, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Japan, Australia, Cyprus, Israel, and Tunisia.

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15 APPENDIX 3: COMPARATIVE STUDY

In order to develop how the Framework works in practice, we compare two case examples from different sides of the globe: the German personnel management association (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Personalführung - DGFP) and the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ).

The vast majority of DGFP members are companies rather than individuals, although individuals can be extra-ordinary members, whereas most organisations in the survey have a predominance of individual members. This distinction obviously means that two of the most common criteria for association membership – education and job experience – do not apply to the German association. However, the third most common criteria does – that of country – as organisations outside of Germany can only be accorded Membership by Correspondence. This differentiating factor also impacts on membership size; associations with individuals as members generally have much higher membership rates than those that predominantly have organisations as members. As such, DGFP is one of the smaller associations of the WFPMA based on membership numbers alone. However, the activities and complexity of the DGFP require it to have a relatively high ratio of staff to members – one staff member to every 40 association members – the second highest ratio in the survey. The DGFP is also in quite a special situation in as much as it is the only personnel management association in the country, whereas over half of all WFPMA association respondents reported that there are other personnel management associations operating in the same country.

In contrast to DGFP, the HRINZ only accepts individuals as members and as such has a membership structure which is more common amongst WFPMA members. Membership is not limited by experience or knowledge, as anyone with an interest or involvement in HR can be admitted. However, members are categorised according to certain criteria being met in order to progress from General to Professional to Life membership. The HRINZ has a similar number of members to the DGFP, although these are individual members rather than corporate members. As a result, the staff to member ratio is much lower. One staff member is employed for every 365 association members – almost ten times the ratio of the DGFP. HR practitioners in New Zealand also have the opportunity to join other HR associations, other than the HRINZ. These other specialist associations cover areas such as training and development, career management, organisation development, remuneration and organisational psychology.

Looking at education and training in Germany, nine out of ten of the individual members have a university degree with the most popular discipline being Economics, followed by Law and Psychology. In the survey, the average of individual members with a degree was eight out of ten, and the most common degree discipline was Business Studies, with Economics being mentioned by less than one in ten associations. In common with almost three-quarters of respondents, a degree is considered as a very important requirement for personnel management practitioners in Germany. However, a personnel management qualification is not seen as being as important: an issue on which Germany stands out from most other countries in the survey. In New Zealand, the proportion of HRINZ members with a degree is about half of that in Germany, which is the second lowest level in the study. However, the HRINZ members are more typical of association members in having Business Studies as their main discipline, followed by Psychology. Again however, HRINZ does agree that a degree is very important for HR practitioners, and also emphasises the importance of a personnel management qualification.

Half the associations - including DGFP - reported that they run professional personnel management certified courses of study. Like many associations, the DGFP courses are well-established and have been running for an average of twenty years. Because of the membership type, the DGFP has a large number of non-members who follow these courses of study. This is unusual compared to other associations. Although HRINZ has a similar number of members, the New Zealand association does not currently run nor recognise certified courses of study. Instead it focuses on the delivery of learning events such as training courses, workshops and conferences, with some 250 individuals attending these events each year. The certification process in New Zealand is based on candidates making an application which describes their areas of skill and knowledge, and which is assessed by a panel of experts. In the DGFP, training courses are also offered to both members and non-members, which is the same as in the majority of associations, with the key areas being Employment Law, Training and Development and Change Management. Although half of the associations in the survey publish guidelines on the skills and knowledge required for personnel management activities and responsibilities, the DGFP is not currently one of these associations. HRINZ publishes a small number of guidelines, mainly on recruitment and selection and employment law. HRINZ also publishes formal guidelines on a code of conduct for personnel management practitioners.