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21st CENTURY HUMAN RESOURCES EXECUTIVE PERCEPTIONS ON FORMAL EDUCATION, ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND PROFESSIONAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT

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**21st CENTURY HUMAN RESOURCES EXECUTIVE PERCEPTIONS ON
FORMAL EDUCATION, ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, AND
PROFESSIONAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT**

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The new business context is prompting management to take a greater interest in the utilization of their organizations human resources. The growing role of a human resources (HR) executive is becoming more of a strategy-oriented business partner of the organizations top managers. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives are preparing HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. The study also examines the perceptions of HR executives as they relate to membership in professional HR organizations and the credibility of the HR professional certification. The findings revealed that the positive perceptions of HR professionals are improving in the educational institutions and business organizations. Colleges and universities, especially at the graduate level, are better preparing prospective HR professionals to become strategic partners within organizations by enhancing their business acumen and strategic management skills during the educational process. Organizations are also becoming more proactive in providing quality development and training in leadership, strategic management, and business acumen for the executive level HR professionals. Also, HR professionals are also becoming more involved in their own self-development through participation in professional HR organizations and the acquiring of professional HR certifications. However, HR professionals assert that their professional HR organizations can become more proactive in developing strategic management and leadership training for upper level HR professionals. This study is significant because it examined a comprehensive approach to HR development rather than focusing on one specific developmental activity.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation work to my family and many friends who have supported and encouraged me along the way. I would like to give a special dedication to my loving parents, the late Cornelius and Viola Thomas. They have instilled in me for many years that I can complete whatever I set my mind to. I would also like to give a special dedication to my late father-in-law, Dr. Alfonzo Greene, and my mother-in-law, Mrs. Estella Greene, who I will always appreciate for their confidence in my abilities.

My greatest dedication goes out to my wife, Mrs. Crystal Greene Thomas for without her this dissertation would not be possible. She has been the person by my side who walked with me through this journey and many times she was behind me pushing me and encouraging me when I felt I could not make it. Now that this journey is complete, her efforts have not fallen in vain.

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I would like to thank my committee members who were very patient with me and shared their expertise to push me through this very important milestone. Special thanks go to Dr. Theresa Pavone, my committee chairperson, for her countless hours of encouragement, understanding, counseling, and motivation, which propelled me to get through this process. Dr. Ingrid Wright-Jones and Dr. Kathleen Hargiss, your counsel was very much appreciated and beneficial to my success in the completion of this educational journey. Thanks again for all you do.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

The new business context is prompting management to take a greater interest in the utilization of human resources (HR) in their organizations. The traditional HR function of staffing, recruiting, compensation, and benefits are losing ground to a new generation of value added core HR functions that include career planning, executive development, training, succession planning, and organization development (Rowden, 1999). The growing role of the HR executive has come to include that of a strategy-oriented business partner of the top managers in organizations. Rowden (1999) asserted that the future role of HR would be supporting a company's competitive advantage by providing high-quality people and helping business managers strategically plan the functions of those people within the organization. Rowden also emphasized several strategic skills needed by the new HR executive, which included a) global operating skills, b) business and financial savvy, c) strategic vision, critical thinking, and problem solving skills, d) ability to use information technology, e) deep HR knowledge, f) change management skills, and g) organizational effectiveness skills.

A study performed by Lawler and Mohrman (2003) revealed that 25% of the heads of HR organizations do not have HR backgrounds. However, the organizations led by people with HR backgrounds received higher ratings. Those organizations led by individuals with HR backgrounds scored higher on providing change management

services, developing organizational skills and capabilities, and helping to develop business strategy.

Not only does the HR executive need to have the background and skill sets to establish an effective business partner relationship with top management, but the HR professional must be a fit for that organization. This fit is based on an organization's strategy and the HR professional's skill set; the competencies an HR leader needs is based on the company's strategy (Wright & Snell, 1998).

Lawler, Boudreau and Mohrman (2006) revealed that a new emphasis in major corporations is to incorporate more value added functions within human resources and the focus of the HR function is in alignment with business consulting and the management of the organization's core competencies. Companies with the greatest intensity of HR practices that reinforce performance have the highest market value per employee. In addition, HR practices can lead to significant increases in the market value of corporations. These HR developments in today's business environment have become significant to the success of organizations (Lawler, Boudreau & Mohrman, 2006).

Rowden (1999) stated,

The new business context is prompting management to take greater interests in the utilization of their organizations human resources. Because of this, the human resource function is playing a far more significant role in corporate strategic planning than ever before. Today's top company executives are increasingly looking to HR to improve the bottom line. (p. 22)

Rowden also asserted that it is imperative for 21st century HR executives to become more aware of the qualifications and skills needed to create a more value added core HR entity within an organization. Rowden suggested some of the core HR competencies needed in the 21st century are career planning, executive development,

training, succession planning, and organizational development. In addition, Rowden noted that HR professionals will be more heavily relied upon to establish an HR program. This role could enhance a corporation's competitive advantage because it allows them to a) hire high quality and competent individuals and b) to establish strategies for these individuals to prosper and grow within the organization. These competencies will help to establish the HR executive as a true business partner within the organization (Rowden, 1999).

Leaders in HR must realize the importance of establishing an effective performance management system. Ramlall (2003) stated, "Performance management systems make clear to employees what is expected of them and ensure managers and strategic planners that employee behavior will be in line with the company's goals" (p. 58).

Ramlall (2003) also stated, "Effective performance management entails a process where each employee is fully aware of his or her role in the organization, the type of output expected, and how the output will be measured" (p. 58). This process can be difficult without the utilization of a business partner (Ramlall, 2003).

In order to establish themselves as effective business partners, HR employees must demonstrate they understand the business goals and strategies of the organization. For example, Wright (1998) tells of a situation where Debbie Smith, Senior Vice President of HR at Merck, noted that the company sought to identify the competencies Merck would need in its leaders and outlined the firm's strategy for the next five to 10 years. Debbie Smith then developed HR systems aimed at producing those competencies among its existing executives and high potential employees. Wright believed Debbie's

actions are an example of how HR employees must present themselves as strategic partners and become more proactive in helping organizations reach their strategic goals. Her action is also an example of how HR organizations can integrate or establish HR processes based on the strategic philosophy of the company.

In addition, HR employees must have an understanding of an organization's products, its customers, and the company's competitive position in the marketplace (Rowden, 1999). Lawler, Boudreau and Mohrman (2006) believed the more the HR organization staff understands the business and participates in strategic design and change management initiatives, the more effective the HR organization.

Background of the Study

Human resources activities have been around for hundreds of years. Activities such as hiring, selecting, and training have been utilized in organizations before the building of Rome (Singer, 1990). Although unspecialized at the time, but like modern-day human resources, employee activities had to be organized and employees had to be paid. Reward and motivational systems were also established during this period. However, some individuals were motivated to perform due to a threat of physical harm based on a lack of performance (Singer, 1990)

Although human resources activities date back to ancient times, it was not until the late 19th century or early part of the 20th century that the formal aspects of human resources were established. Little consideration was given to the overall employee welfare or to individual employee's needs (Singer, 1990). Due to a lack of the companies' consideration for the employee's need, unions were established. Many executives were convinced that labor unions created impediments to trust and alignment

(Langbert, 2002). Many leaders of organizations believed they would lose some executive powers with the integration of labor unions, which prompted the social welfare movement. Employers became more engaged in designing processes to improve the employee work environment. Employers hired social or welfare secretaries to assist organizations in how they could improve working conditions for employees and, on some occasions, the secretaries assisted workers in securing housing or medical care and other personal matters. This marked the beginning of employer actions used to reduce the influence of labor unions (Singer, 1990).

The Hawthorne Studies, which were conducted at General Electric from the 1920s through the 1930s, revealed that workers' attitudes towards their managers and coworkers were directly related to their productivity. The Hawthorne Effect implied that productivity is a direct result of management interest in the development of workers. This revelation was the beginning of employee relations within the modern day organization (Singer, 1990).

Soon after the implementation of employee relations, another major contribution to human resources evolved—behavioral sciences philosophy, which was the result of a combined study of social and biological sciences (Singer, 1990). Singer asserted that the behavioral science philosophy qualified productivity as directly related to the individual and group feelings of moral, motivation, and job satisfaction among workers.

Faulkner (2002) stated, “A major turning point for human resources grew from the civil unrest of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Act changed the way businesses looked at, hired, and treated their people” (p. 32). The need for diversity in the workplace gained recognition as a significant issue that required attention. There were also several other

governmental legislations that influenced the HR structure and focus within organizations, which included the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, and the implementation of Affirmative Action (Faulkner, 2002).

Due to these legislations the past 40 years have been witness to an unprecedented amount of litigation related to employee rights. The rights of employees have become paramount in the legal and business communities. Legislative and legal complexities have prompted employers to reevaluate the importance and utilization of their HR departments. The activities of human resources have been identified as important in determining the success or failure of an organization rather than frivolous and unnecessary expenses, as they had been characterized in the past (Singer, 1990)

Faulkner (2002) noted many employees working in personnel fields were employees who were well liked, but were unable to fulfill their previous job assignments. However, Faulkner (2002) stated,

Today's HR is responsible for analyzing and researching market trends as they relate to the labor pool, as well as keeping up to date with all things legal. HR staff now holds specialized degrees, often with additional professional certifications, and have come a long way from the original personnel clerks. (p. 33)

In addition Singer (1990) explained that the success and failure of today's organizations are now connected to some HR activities which were once deemed as frivolous or unnecessary.

Statement of the Problem

An article by Payne (2010) suggested that the common perceived image of HR executives in many organizations is that they do not possess the necessary business and leadership skills to acquire the role of business partner. Employees as well as managers

view HR professionals as lacking the business acumen, functional expertise, and strategic thinking necessary to move their companies forward (Payne, 2010)

Ramlall and Shepeck (2006) asserted that the role of the HR executive within an organization is that of a truly strategic business partner. Competencies of HR executives must be much broader than those competencies of the traditional HR employee; so greater emphasis should be given to developing broader business competencies to include all components of skills necessary to manage a business effectively in the global economy (p.10).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and existing HR leadership prepare their HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. The study examines how organizations and HR professionals develop the business competencies needed in today's organizations. The Global Human Resources Competency Study revealed that business acumen was a critical gap in many of today's HR professionals (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012). The purpose of the study was also to examine the ways in which organizations and HR professionals try to fill the business acumen gap identified in today's HR professionals.

Rationale

Capelli and Yang (2010) viewed human resources as a critical point between society and business. They stated,

The human resource function matters more than its practitioners tend to think. While it lacks the glamour within the business community of fields like strategy, its actions have a profound effect on the lives of employees, who represent about

one-quarter of the population. Human resources is a crucial point of intersection between the broader society and business. Trends in society, such as two-career families, play out here. Similarly, business practices that have the biggest effects on society, like downsizing, also take place through human resources. Understanding how the human resource function is changing is therefore important not only for those in the function but also for those with broader interests in business and society. (p.1)

The business world has become more complex and competitive than any other time in history. Because of various influences on the business environment, including competition, technology, and worker growth, organizations constantly evaluate how they operate (Lawler, Boudreau & Mohrmon, 2006).

Moss (2008) explained that HR executives have a unique role in any organization that influences each department throughout the entire organization as well as corporate management, vision, leadership, culture, and organizational credibility. Moss (2008) stated,

During the past 20 years, we have seen tremendous growth in the demands on the HR profession. Human resource professionals have been asked to do more things and take on additional responsibilities, including leadership development, recruitment, retention, and motivation and employee satisfaction. Nevertheless, at the same time, we have a new context for what we do. We need to be excellent in the traditional things as well. (p. 48)

There is increasing concern among HR professionals about large organizations choosing non-HR executives to head their human resources department. A review of the 50 largest companies found that 15 of the Fortune 50 heads of HR have no HR background before holding the position. Although studies showed that organizations headed by people with HR backgrounds scored higher on the development of business strategies, this could be perceived as an indictment of how current HR professionals are

fulfilling their function and performing their responsibilities (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

Moerk, an Executive Vice President of Human Resources for Nokia, explains that experience in several areas of business such as finance, marketing, and sales has helped him take on his current role. This perspective has been a recurring theme among top corporate leaders and HR executives. In addition, being able to acquire experience in operations and international areas can help to develop an HR department that is more robust and ready for the board room (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

The Mercer Global HR Transformation Study in 2006 revealed that the weakest skills were perceived to be in the areas of finance, business strategy, organizational assessment and design, cross-functional expertise, and cost analysis and management. In addition, the study also revealed HR skills that might be needed in the near future, including recordkeeping, vendor management, knowledge about compliance and corporate regulations, technology understanding, and data management (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

Human Resources professionals must learn to continually develop their own skills outside of the HR arena, concentrating in the areas of finance, management, and corporate compliance. When looking to improve HR knowledge, we must learn to network with experts in the field, as well as establish relationships with other HR peers. Attending professional seminars and networking events gives the HR professional an opportunity to meet with people who perform similar work (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,” 2008).

We must realize that a degree is not enough to excel in the field of HR; instead HR management is a continually evolving profession. Human Resources professionals must read current literature in the field and utilize specialized HR websites. This is how top HR professionals remain grounded and react to current market changes (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,” 2008). Rynes, Brown, and Colbert (2002) state, “Companies whose HR professionals read the academic research literature have higher financial performance than those that do not” (p. 93).

Human resources professionals should also seek out professional certifications such as the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR). This could help them with the challenges associated with keeping their knowledge up-to-date, as well as learning new techniques and ideas (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,” 2008).

Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was: What are the perceptions of executive level HR professionals towards their formal education, organization’s development and training programs, and their own self-development?

The question helped the researcher to assess whether today’s HR executives believe their training has given them the required skills needed for the role of business partner in today’s organizations.

Significance of the Study

Loshali and Krishnan (2013) articulated that the HR function role has changed a lot recently and HR professionals are more frequently considered business partners. It was also noted that HR professionals must assume the role of strategic partner along with

other top executives in a proactive way to ensure effective alignment with the overall business goals.

Business organizations, executives, and HR Professionals must understand the comprehensive development and growth activities which are imperative to HR professionals overcoming the challenges to succeed in the 21st century and bringing higher value and productivity to organizations. Moss (2008) examined and articulated how business enterprises and HR executives benefit when organizations are intimately involved in the growth and development of their HR counterparts. Business organizations can be more proactive and involved in HR cross training and mentoring (Moss, 2008). Although this is a very important aspect in improving HR competencies, it only focuses on one particular aspect.

This study included college and university curriculum for a comprehensive approach to HR development. The study also examined whether HR executives are becoming more involved in their own professional growth, which includes HR certifications and membership in various HR organizations. Lastly, it examined whether business organizations are proactive in establishing cross training, mentoring, and the sponsoring of workshops and seminars in the field of HR. This study was significant because it applied a comprehensive approach to HR development rather than focusing on one specific developmental activity.

Definition of Terms

This study utilized the following terms and concepts, which need to be defined.

Competencies are a collection of professional characteristics associated with related knowledge, abilities and skills that directly affect a major part of an individual's

job. They can also be associated with an individual's motive, trait, skills, or body of knowledge that he or she uses. Competencies are also a set of behavior patterns that an individual needs in order to perform his tasks and functions with competence (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006).

Human Capital is an organization's composition of employee's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Ployhart, Van Iddekinge, & Mackenzie, 2011).

Human Resource Certification Institute (HRIC) is an accredited and independent organization which is the only provider of specific, targeted HR certifications (Kells & Miles, 2015). Dufrane (cited in Kells & Miles 2015) who is the CEO of the HRIC stated, "The HRIC has a forty year history of developing credentials for HR professionals, by HR professionals" (p. 260).

Human Resource Management is the management of people and organizations from a macro perspective, i.e. managing people in the form of a collective relationship between management and employees. It also includes the responsibility an organization has for its productive use of and constructive dealing with its employees (Ivanovic, 2006, p. 128).

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is a non-profit organization and the world's largest association devoted to human resource management (Schoeff, 2008). Schoeff (2008) stated, "Representing more than 233,000 members worldwide, SHRM is growing in part by reaching out to people who are not traditionally seen as being part of the HR profession" (P. 18).

Strategic Management "involves making those decisions that define the overall mission and objectives of the organization, determining the most effective utilization of

those resources, and crafting and executing the strategy in ways that produce the intended results” (Carrell, Elbert, & Hatfield, 1995, p. 9).

Human Resource Development is defined as “the process of developing or unleashing human expertise through organization development and employee training and development for the purpose of improving performance at the individual, process, and organizational levels” (Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006, p. 9)

Cross Training is the act of teaching an employee—hired to perform one job function—the skills required to perform other job functions. It improves understanding of different departments and the organization as a whole, and increases knowledge, know-how, skills, and work performance (Gawali, 2009).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions associated with the design of this study. The assumptions are listed as follows.

1. The research participants will be honest and able to articulate their lived experiences.
2. The HR executives will be comfortable with the interview process.
3. The researcher assumed that the participants associated with the study were qualified representatives of the population.
4. It was assumed that the self-reported demographics were sufficiently free of error.
5. The growing role of an HR executive has come to include a strategy-oriented business partner of the organizations top managers.

Limitations

1. The research did not attempt to solicit input from managers outside of the HR function.
2. All of the participants were from Alabama.

Nature of the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was based on assessing a) HR executives' formal education, b) HR executive development and training in organizations, and c) HR executive self-development (HR professional organizations and HR certification). The literature review examined how the roles and expectations of HR professionals have shifted to a more strategic role in organizations and how colleges, universities and organizational development and training programs prepare HR executives to effectively function in their new roles. In addition, the literature accessed HR professionals' self-development in the areas of membership in HR professional organizations and their participation in HR certification.

The traditional HR functions of staffing, recruiting, compensation, and benefits are losing ground to a new generation of value added core HR functions. The growing role of an HR executive is evolving to a strategy-oriented business partner of the organizations top managers (Rowden, 1999). Not only does the HR executive need to have the background and skill sets to establish an effective business partner relationship with top management, but the HR professional must also be a fit for that organization. The HR fit is based on an organization's strategy and the HR professional's skill set. In other words, the competencies required of an HR leader are based on the company's

strategy (Wright & Snell, 1998). The framework of this study used a comprehensive format to assess how HR executives are prepared to become strategic partners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study came from two perspectives in order for the researcher to realize the purpose of this study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives prepare HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

The first perspective came from the Society for Human Resource Management's extensive study on how universities can enhance the competencies and skill levels of HR professionals. The study identified parameters universities should use when creating or modifying a degree program in human resources. Their study resulted in the development of a guidebook utilized by accredited colleges and universities that gives these institutions a comprehensive source for tracking HR curriculum that provides a common minimum skill set needed by employers who work to fill HR professional positions (Shrm.org/education/hrededucation).

The second perspective came from Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory. This is a motivational theory that distinguishes between the different types of motivation, particularly within intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads towards separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory was used to see how organizations use extrinsic motivation with HR professionals to acquire the needed business skills and how HR professionals

themselves use intrinsic motivation to help them acquire the necessary skills sets needed in the 21st century.

Ryan and Deci (2000) stated, “To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feel no impetus or aspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, where as someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated” (p. 54). The researcher examined what organizations are doing to inspire HR executives to do something as it relates to improving their business skill sets.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of this study includes chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. Chapter two provides a literature review that highlights literature associated with HR professional’s formal education, competencies, organizational development programs, HR self-development, and HR certification. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to conduct this research study. Chapter 4 describes the analysis of the study and uses rich text to support the data. Chapter 5 reveals the results of the study, their implications, and gives recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Over the past several years, organizations have come to realize that HR has become and will remain a viable and important aspect of any business organization. In today's competitive business environment, organizations must allow human resource management to emerge as a more critical factor in ensuring and maintaining the company's success and competitive advantage. Organizations must recognize HR as a more involved and informed entity within the organization. Ulrich, Losey, and Lake (1997) stated, "Tomorrow HR management is about creating the future right in your own company, adapting to meet the needs of your enterprise and the demands of a changing business environment" (p.1).

Current and future HR issues and concerns gain more attention than they did in the old traditional HR structure. Human resources departments have been mandated to revitalize, redefine, and evaluate their role within the organization. To accomplish these goals Ulrich, Losey and Lake (1997) identified six themes that form prescriptive actions for the HR professional of the 21st century:

1. Manage human resources like a business. HR departments must become more business focused. This means that HR departments will need to have clear outcomes they deliver to the business with clear theory and focus guiding actions within the department.
2. Play New Roles. HR professionals will have many new roles to play in the organization and competitive environment of the future.
3. Respect History, Create a Future. HR functions must change. Rather than merely live for an uncertain future, HR needs to be grounded in its past. The

discipline of human resources has a history of strengths and challenges. The strengths are that much of the history should be maintained and moving toward the future. The challenges are that some of that history needs to be changed to meet the future with competence.

4. Build an Infrastructure. The HR infrastructure focuses on how the HR function is governed. It deals with issues such as measurement of HR practices, competencies of HR, and the changing role of HR leaders.
5. Remember the "Human" in human resources. Sometimes, in the quest to be business partners, HR professionals have focused more on the business and less on the people side of the business. Under the label of intellectual or human capital, HR professionals need to keep focusing their attention on the human side of the enterprise.
6. Go Global. Technological advances in information, travel, media, and other parts of our lives have made a large world smaller. Changes in one country are quickly understood and/ or adapted throughout the world.

These are not the only themes for the future of HR, but they do indicate issues that are salient while also unsolved. They will need to receive more attention over the next few years. (p. 4)

HR Competencies and Roles

Kiger (2008) reported on a survey conducted by Workforce Management and Equa Terra, an information technology and business process transformation consulting firm. The survey was conducted among 250 global human resource decision-makers, which revealed that among companies consisting of 50,000 or more employees, 71% of management now see HR as a strategic player. This development is the result of many executive managers refocusing their HR professionals to concentrate on more business and strategic activities. The co-authors of the study emphasized that a company's failure to recognize human resources strategic potential put themselves at a serious disadvantage. In addition the survey revealed that 70% of respondents identified human capital management and 63% picked "perform as a stronger partner and corporate and strategic planning efforts" when asked what HR activities would contribute the most value to the

business, (Kiger, 2008). Kiger also stated, “The study found that in companies where human resources are viewed more strategically, there tends to be a higher opinion of HR’s capabilities, even in parts of the function that are not strategic” (p. 8).

Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) examined the past, present, and future roles of the HR profession within business organizations, which has experienced significant transformation over past three decades. However, the underlying question was whether or not the HR profession has evolved; or rather, has HR arrived at its final destination or will the journey continue? (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). Ulrich and Dulebohn stated,

The field of HR and most HR professionals has made significant progress in the last few decades as a core business function, or contribution to business success, and with professional stature. But, the journey ahead continue with the direction of delivering and creating value more than having a single point in time destination where HR manages any event or progress. (p. 188)

The authors believed HR should add value. They reviewed the emergence of HR as a function within business organizations and how its early functions were involved in the management of employment relationships. Ulrich and Dulebohn also credited Taylor, Frank, and Gilbreath as early contributors to the HR profession.

The modern transformation of HR began in the early 1980s where HR professionals and business organizations began to see the need for transforming HR from an administrative function to a core business function that contributed to organizational effectiveness. The transformation of HR was realized in three transformational waves:

1. the administrative wave of HR,
2. the HR practices way, and
3. the strategy wave.

The strategy wave was viewed as where HR is today. Human resources must now move from strategy to a higher level of value within the organization (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015) proposed several propositions for how to move HR forward. They proposed HR must focus on business contacts and external stakeholders including customers, investors, and community. The future role of HR and talent acquisition would be dependent on commitment, competence, and contribution. Another proposition was that future HR work should focus on identifying and building organizational capabilities as well as building leadership depth by investing in leadership development. This would support organizational strategy and add value. Future HR also needed to be appropriately structured to fit the structure of the business and investing practices related to people, performance, and innovation. Human resources professionals must also learn to adapt in future challenges consisting of risk management, sustainability, and globalization. Finally, when addressing the ability of HR professionals to add value to the future HR skills in analytics and using metrics as tools to support decision-making would be essential (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Srimannarayana (2013) conducted a research study consisting of collecting data on executives representing different organizations in India. Srimannarayana stated,

The competitive business environment generates a wide variety of issues and challenges to human resource management. HR professionals need to demonstrate required competencies to address the issues and challenges. The purpose of this study is to find out the extent of demonstration of HR competencies but HR professionals while discharging their roles and responsibilities. (p. 298)

The study identified that HR professionals often demonstrated credible activist competencies; however, the study also identified that the business ally and strategy architect competencies of HR professionals on certain areas needed development.

Srimannarayana (2013) replicated the human resource competency model developed by Ulrich et al. in 2008, which consisted of 121 items dealing with six domains of HR competencies covering six domains and 21 subdomains of the six domains. The six domains identified in the study were credible activists, culture and change steward, talent manager/organizational designer, strategy architect, operational executor, and business ally. To find out the differences, if any, and the perception of executives on HR competencies, the research was based on the type and size of organizations in which they worked, gender, educational background, work experience, level of management, and functional area (HR and non-HR) of executives (p. 301).

The study revealed that of the respondents, 36.87% represented manufacturing organizations, 43.6% represented working service organizations, and 19.53% belonged to information technology organizations. A 59.76% majority of the respondents worked in large organizations, 12.96% of respondents worked in medium-sized organizations, and 27.27% of respondents were from small organizations. The gender breakdown of respondents showed that 29.46% of the respondents were women and 66.77% were men. The educational background of respondents revealed that 33.33% of respondents were graduates and 66.77% were postgraduates. The experience level of respondents revealed that 69.19% had 2 to 5 years of experience; 21.72% had 5 to 10 years of experience; and 9% has completed more than 11 years of work experience. Non-HR respondents made up 74.92% of the sample. Among the respondents, the level of management reflected that

22.73% held senior positions; 10% were mid-level managers; and the remaining 64% belonged to junior level management.

A study conducted by Srimannarayana (2013) revealed that credible activists were the top competency demonstrated by HR professionals. It also revealed that the higher the experience, the higher the perception of HR competencies. When examining the culture and change steward competency the respondents identified that HR professionals belong to manufacturing organizations were better able to demonstrate the competencies associated with facilitating change, and the valuing of culture. The talent manager / organization design or competency revealed that the HR professionals often demonstrated their competency by implementing best HR practices and retention strategies. They were able to develop talent various learning and leadership development programs. The strategy architect competency revealed that HR professionals have demonstrated a moderate level of the Spanish strategic agility and engaging customers. This competency has been identified as an area of much-needed improvement for the HR professionals. The operational executor competency revealed that HR professionals often demonstrate the ability and implementation of workplace policies. Finally the business ally competency received the lowest score and presented a major opportunity for development of the HR professional (Srimannarayana, 2013). Srimannarayana stated, “It is imperative now for HR professionals to build the competencies that can be perceived by non-HR managers more positively” (p. 311).

Johnson (1997) portrayed the 21st-century HR executive as a mover and shaker, a strategic thinker, a proactive leader, and a vital partner to the organization’s CEO. Johnson articulated how HR managers must move away from traditional HR activities

and develop higher skills and competencies in the areas of acquisitions, divestitures, reorganizations, staffing trends, as well as keeping abreast of their competitors' actions and strategies. In addition, they must also heighten their competencies and the financial areas of the business which includes the cost implications of the HR's recommendations, which could ultimately affect an organization's bottom line (Johnson, 1997).

The changing competencies demanded of HR managers in the 21st century has resulted in many organizations recruiting and hiring HR executives from outside of the organization and outside of HR department itself (Johnson, 1997). A comprehensive review of companies of all sizes identified that HR positions paying \$200,000 or more came from outside of the organization or HR as a whole. Only one eighth of the HR professionals promoted from within secured the top HR jobs within the organization. This illustrates the importance for organizations to establish a more business-oriented development structure for the current HR organizations within the firm (Johnson, 1997).

Payne (2010) acknowledged that the current perceived image of HR in many organizations is that they do not possess the necessary business and leadership skills to acquire the role of business partner. Employees as well as managers view HR professionals as lacking the business acumen, functional expertise, and strategic thinking necessary to move their companies forward.

Payne's (2010) comparative study consisted of HR managers and non-HR managers.

HR managers were asked to rate the importance of the HR strategic competencies in their organization and to rate their own qualifications. Similarly, non-HR managers were asked to rate the importance of the same set of HR strategic competencies in their organization and to rate and HR managers ability to level in the same competencies at their organization. (p. 7)

The survey focused on six HR competencies: a) strategic management, b) business knowledge, c) management of talent, d) employee relations, e) quality of work and family life, and f) information technology. The results noted that

Overall, HR managers and non-HR managers (N=120) were in a reasonable agreement about the level of importance of the six competency domains at their organization. They perceived strategic management is the most important competencies and information technology as the least important competencies for HR manager. However, HR managers and non-HR managers failed to agree on the ability rating of HR professionals in the six competency areas. HR managers rated the ability of above average in all competency areas, by contrast non-HR managers rated HR managers' proficiency level and abilities as below average in four of the competency domains and above-average in only their abilities in strategic management (Payne, 2010, p.).

Payne (2010) stated,

The findings indicated no significant differences in the ratings HR managers between the paired of variables of importance and ability. They may thus, have perceived their own ability level according to how important they believed a competence domain was to their organization. In contrast, they failed to meet non-HR managers' expectations of demonstrating high level of ability in all competency domains. This suggests that HR managers had perceived deficiencies at a strategic level. These deficiencies may be partly due to their lack of trusting relationships with those outside the HR function found critical for HR's credibility. (p.10)

Jones (1997) noted the results of a preliminary study, which was designed to learn what human resource professionals think of their jobs and where it is positioned in their organization. The responses from more than 200 HR managers from European companies with international operations identified that just 32% felt that HR played a lead role in their organization, although 54% of the respondents thought that it should be seen as playing a lead role. These results bear out that approximately 2/3 of the respondents identified HR as not being a leading player but relegated as a support role in their

organization. Only one half of the respondents were involved in critical strategic "people" issues in their organization.

Warech and Tracey (2004) noted that human resource management within an organization is comprised of many facets, which include a complex blend of human capital practices. Some of these practices may be required for corporation's maintenance and administration. However, other HR practices create value for the organization.

Warech and Tracey stated, "The task that forces HR managers to seek to establish the financial impact of their departments is to be able to show which practices are the ones that create value" (p.376).

When assessing the impact of HR, many organizations use a variety of analyses and data. A larger organization often uses the services of professional consultants. One of the most appealing or popular perspectives has been the use of the service profit-chain-model. This model focuses its framework on how investments in employees are directly linked to individual performance results, which leads to yielding higher levels of service quality at lower cost. This approach has been noted to influence customer satisfaction and loyalty, which ultimately drives an organization's profitability and growth (Warech & Tracy, 2004).

Warech and Tracey (2004) asserted that Sears is a great example of an organization that successfully implemented the service profit chain process. In the 1990s Sears was losing billions of dollars annually, which resulted in restructuring and the closing of many stores. This process linked employee and customer components with objective financial elements such as revenues and profits. After extensive data collection, management and human resources were able to identify two particular employee attitudes

and perceptions about their jobs and about the company, both of which had a significant effect on employee loyalty, retention, and an overall positive behavior towards the organization's customers. These actions not only resulted in improved customer service, but they directly influenced the revenue growth, operating margins, and return on assets (Wareck & Tracy, 2004).

Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, and Ulrich (2012) described the results of the 2012 Global Human Resources Competency Study (HRCS). The article captured several key findings of the research, which include six fundamental competency domains. These competency domains were identified as important factors that HR professionals must learn to demonstrate to have impact on an organization's business performance.

The data from the Global HRCS involved over 20,000 individuals from HR professionals and educational organizations from around the world. In order to define potential competencies for HR professionals, the research study utilized focus groups, theory, research, and experience to identify what effective HR professionals must know and do. There were 139 specific behavioral competency descriptions tested during the study (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012).

The six fundamental competency domains identified during the study were a) strategic positioner, b) credible activists, c) capability builder, d) change champion, e) human resource innovator and integrator, and f) technology proponent (pp. 218-220).

Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, (2012) state:

Because the six domains of HR competence address external trends, they have an impact on both the perceived effectiveness of the HR professional and the performance of the business supported by the HR professional. According to the study, HR professional competence explains almost 10% of business success. But the competencies that predict personal effectiveness are slightly different business

success, with insights on technology, HR integration, and capability building having a greater impact business results. The challenge not surprisingly is to ensure all the HR professional competence and the HR organizational effectiveness required for contribution and sustained high performance (p. 220).

The HRCS study was able to provide specific insights on where HR must improve and where HR is strong. The study revealed today's ongoing assessment of the importance of competent HR management within an organization to help with their business performance and overall development (Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2012).

Developing the New HR Professional

Ziedner (2015) focused on how HR professionals must take charge in rebuilding HR's reputation in business organizations. The article highlighted how it's high time for HR professionals to renovate and innovate the profession by structuring its own professional development to meet the needs of a fast changing business world. Human resource professionals must reshape the business community's expectations of HR by developing their core skills and competencies. This can only be accomplished by HR professionals focusing on the professional development of other departments within the organization, and through conscientious efforts to focus on their own professional development (Zeidner, 2015).

Zeidner (2015) acknowledged that HR had an image problem as it was viewed as having a lack of business savvy. Executives have notated HR professionals in the highest levels "are process oriented generalists who have expertise in personnel benefits, compensation and labor relations" (p. 28). In addition, "they don't know how key

decisions are made, and they have great difficulty analyzing why people or parts of the organization are meeting the business performance goals” (p. 28).

Zeidner (2015) focused on the competency model developed by the Society of Human Resource Management in 2012 as a model to help develop today’s HR professionals. The competency model identified nine primary competencies:

1. business acumen
2. communication
3. consultation
4. critical evaluation
5. ethical practice
6. global and cultural effectiveness
7. leadership and navigation
8. relationship management
9. HR expertise.

In addition the model also identified several basic performance expectations at various stages of an HR professional’s career. The competency model helped dispel the myth among executives and HR professionals that HR practitioners need only a firm grounding and HR basics.

The SHRM competency model helped HR professionals enhance their leadership and other pertinent skills necessary for the business. In addition other strategies were identified to help HR professionals meet today’s challenges. Human resources professionals can learn to be an innovator by keeping up with HR research and trends and can be a technology champion by learning how to drive HR organizational functions by

utilizing technology. In addition, HR professionals can also develop their business acumen skills and learn how to crunch numbers by collecting data and analyzing them to make informed business decisions. The new HR professional must not only develop people skills, but they must also become multidimensional in order to rebuild the HR brand (Zeidner, 2015).

Rowden (1999) noted the development of HR professionals must be aligned with the new skills and competencies needed in the 21st century. The traditional HR roles of staffing, recruiter, compensation, insurance claims administration, employee assistance programs, the 401(k) plan administration, dependent care assistance, and other non-value added functions are being outsourced by many companies in an effort to become more competitive. This allows HR to move from administrative support to a strategic business partner (Rowden, 1999).

A traditional HR professional's career could consist of minimal supervisory or leadership skills during their first five or six years; in addition, they usually acquire no experience during this time frame outside of HR. They may have accumulated only a secondary knowledge of the business ("Protecting HR's Seat," 2008). An HR Generalist usually progresses into a more specialized field before progressing to a HR Manager position. Many times, they have sown the responsibility of one or more business units, before moving into a directorship or an executive level of HR.

However, May (cited in "Protecting Hr's Seat,"2008) who is a vice president at Boeing asserted that there are some negatives that could be hurting the HR chances to succeed in the executive board room. May believed the traditional model does not produce the business savvy, now in demand. May stated, "They have not acquired the

skills needed to understand the business from a customer, consumer, supplier or financial perspective. Finally, they are unlikely to have a large-scale project management or vendor experience.” (p. 13). For large organizations, these skills are much in demand (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

Human resources executives and CEOs must actively work together to establish a development program and process that enables the HR professional to acquire the skills and competencies needed for the 21st century. This development program must fill the educational and training gaps that exist within the existing developmental process. The Mercer Global HR Transformation Study in 2006 found that the weakest HR skills were perceived to be in the areas of finance, business strategy, organizational assessment and design, cross functional expertise, and cost analysis and management. This study also revealed the skills that HR professionals would need in the future, including financial, recordkeeping and data management, vendor management, technology understanding, and knowledge about the compliance and corporate regulations (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

To help and satisfy these deficiencies, May suggested that HR professionals a) begin by looking for broader educational foundations, b) develop HR professional leadership skills early in their careers, c) seek out cross functional assignments throughout their career, including critical jobs, large projects, or developmental work, d) ensure global experience early in their career whenever possible, and e) gain significant people experience from outside of HR environments (“Protecting HR’s Seat,” 2008).

Moss (2008) gave a great example of how learning business acumen can benefit the HR professional and the organization in maintaining a competitive advantage. Moss

relays the experience of an Executive Vice President of Human Resources for Nokia, which is a world leader in the converging Internet and communications industries. The Executive Vice President had global responsibility for all human resource activities for the company's 100,000 employees, including compensation, benefits, employee development, management and leadership development, staffing, and global divers. In addition, as part of Nokia's Group Executive Board he also had the responsibility for managing the company's operations from its headquarters in White Plains, New York. The company's revenues were \$79 billion in 2007 (Moss, 2008).

Moss (2008) showed the powerful impact a competent HR executive can have on business results. Human resources success can be seen in all aspects of an organization including corporate management, vision, leadership, and credibility. In addition, HR also affects managers, customers, shareholders, supplies, and vendors.

Moss (2008) suggested that understanding the business and the numbers give you a lot of credibility although these things may not have been important years ago, but these days, they are critical skills. Moss said over the past 20 years, he has seen tremendous growth in the demands on the HR profession and he has seen HR professionals being asked to do more things and take on additional responsibilities. Human resources professionals need to enhance their competency levels to include financials, operations, marketing, sales, and business acumen; however HR professionals must also remain committed to our traditional HR functions (Moss, 2008).

Baill (1999) examined and highlighted the importance of utilizing a vast array of approaches and sources to enhance the capabilities of the 21st-century HR professionals. These approaches include acquiring partnerships with universities, professional

association, and identifying organization's best practices. It is stated, "Developing competence is a combination of education, experience, interest, and raw capability (intelligence) plus personal credibility (ethics)" (p. 172). A well-rounded HR professional must engage in several developmental activities to ensure the best overall results in improving their competency levels (Baill, 1999).

Today's organizations must take the lead as it relates to growing and enhancing the competencies of HR professionals in organizations. Through the combination of utilizing their own efforts, partnering with professional associations, universities, and other companies, organizations have seen the capabilities and competencies of their HR professionals grow immensely (Baill, 1999).

Baill (1999) used several examples of companies that utilized developmental strategies to improve their HR department's effectiveness. An example is Quantum Corporation, which helped spearhead improvement in HR competencies by a) developing organizational developmental skills and b) building a stronger understanding of the business in order to contribute as a business partner. They also used the organization's international and national conferences as an opportunity to grow and enhance HR capabilities by sharing best practices utilized throughout the organization. In addition, they utilized these conferences to educate and inform HR professionals on the overall business strategy of the organization in order to help develop the HR's business acumen and understanding. Baill (1999) stated, "The combined focus on internal development of our HR managers capabilities with the acquisition of experienced "the new model" HR managers has strengthened our ability as a function to better respond to the business needs" (p. 173).

Baill (1999) also highlighted how other companies such as General Electric, IBM, and Arthur Andersen were seen as industry leaders as it related to the development of their HR professionals. General Electric utilizes a Human Resource Leadership Program in which HR managers are required to go through a two-year comprehensive training period to increase HR competence and business acumen. This includes a combination of rotational assignments cross training and functional assignments outside of the HR department as well as utilizing educational seminars, networking, and development opportunities.

When HR development strategies are utilized properly the whole company benefits and members of top management down to line managers can see the impact growth and benefit in a well-developed business-minded HR professional. Baill (1999) stated, "When a line manager loses access to the "new model" HR professional he is unwilling to accept an HR professional without those capabilities" (p. 175).

As the requirements of the HR professional begin to grow, HR managers as well as organizations must continue to be proactively involved and understand and meet the challenge of the growing competency needs of today's 21st-century HR professional. Human resources professionals must have an opportunity to work together as well as with corporations, professional associations, and academic institutions. The better HR and organizations can work together utilizing the various modes of development, the faster HR will be able to meet the needs of today's business enterprises and enhance an organizations growth and productivity (Baill, 1999).

The future of HR must also include understanding the usefulness and pitfalls of the utilization of social media within your organization. Social media refers to the use of

Internet technology that enables people to connect, develop relationships, share knowledge, and collaborate with each other (Ingham, 2010). Many organizations see social media as a threat; but when used in the proper context, social media may provide some clear opportunities for businesses, too. Ingham (2010) advised that when setting up a social media framework for an organization, one must first develop a vision for the future and partner with the organization's IT professional to ensure your vision is manageable and to agree on which platforms to focus. Human resources professionals should focus on the greatest areas of opportunity including recruitment, learning, and internal communication. Due to several pitfalls in utilizing social media, extensive training and development of sound governance around the use of this technology should be a priority for its implementation. Measuring the success of a social media project can be done by monitoring the participation and contributions to the organization. The early returns for the utilization of social media are rarely captured in monetary gains. Early investment in social media is captured by the intangible benefits such as better communication and hiring strategies (Ingham, 2010).

HR Professionals Self Development

In today's strategic and competitive environment, HR departments must learn to be responsible for their own professional self-development. Human resources professionals can become more proactive in improving their knowledge and competencies in a number of ways. Some may prefer to work with experts in the field, as well as peers, while others may depend on gaining qualifications and academic information gleaned from textbooks and the Internet ("Career Development: Degrees of Learning,"2008). The most important aspect is not how we gain additional knowledge

and competencies, but whether or not we are searching for ways to increase our knowledge and competencies. Not only is it important for HR professionals to increase their knowledge, but it is as equally important for HR professionals to make themselves known to their peers, (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,”2008).

The article “Career Development: Degrees of Learning” in the September 2008 issue of Employee Benefits, examined several ways HR professional can utilize self-development to enhance HR knowledge and competencies. The article noted the Internet and magazines can be valuable tools in enhancing a HR professionals’ knowledgebase. They can access comments from thinkers on the ground that reacts to current market changes. Human resources professionals can also study for certifications with in their field such as the PHR or SPHR. These certifications may help them with the challenge of keeping their knowledge up-to-date, as well as learning new techniques and ideas (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,”2008).

Many proactive HR executives actively seek out professional conferences or events, which could enhance themselves as well as their fellow HR colleagues. They use these events as opportunities to learn new strategies and tips are being utilized in other organizations. The article empathized that it is important for those attending such events to have some knowledge of the field before they go so they can build on their understanding and also offer insights to others. It is important to remember that networking, reading, and hard work are some of the major factors in an HR professional’s development (“Career Development: Degrees of Learning,”2008)

Another major aspect in obtaining additional HR knowledge is the utilization of HR research. Rynes, Brown, and Colbert (2002) stated, “Companies whose HR

professionals read the academic research literature have higher financial performance than those that do not” (p. 93). Certain HR practices are constantly related to higher individual performance, organizational productivity, and firm financial performance; in addition, research shows the relationship between HR practices in performance at the level of the firm rather than the individual. In essence, HR practices can have considerable impact on both individual and organizational performance (Rynes, Brown, & Colbert, 2002).

HR and the University Curriculum

In reviewing the progression and evolution of the HR curriculum in universities and colleges, Kaufman (1999) stated,

Current day University human resource educational programs have their beginnings in the late 1910s and early 1920s when textbooks and courses in personnel management first appeared, an event that occurred in tandem with the emergence of personnel management/industrial relations as a new functional area of business practice. (p. 103)

Since its beginnings, human resource management along with its college curriculum courses has grown in a number of ways. Due to the confrontational environment between unions and employers, early University educational courses focused primarily on unions and labor legislation. Some estimated that as much as 75% of curricula were geared towards unions and labor (Kaufman, 1999).

In the early years HR management/personnel management was indoctrinated in the area of economics. However, HR management was gradually indoctrinated within the psychology curriculum of universities due to the new emphasis on employee relations. This was the beginning of HR focus on organizational behavior (OB). During this time industrial relations played a less active role in HR education. By the 1990s a number of

college and universities personnel/human resource management programs had become in effect *applied OB* (Kaufman, 1999).

Recent information revealed that many HR programs in colleges and universities are gradually moving away from organizational behavior and industrial relations and focus more on business school curricula. Kaufman (1999) stated, “Courses in personnel or HR management are now found in nearly every university or college with some type of undergraduate or graduate business or management program” (p.107). In essence, many universities dropped courses associated with industrial sociology and other social science courses in exchange for increased curricular in areas associated with business such as finance accounting and marketing (Way, 1996).

Kaufman (1999) noted that today’s HR education/curriculum is better mirroring the industry trends as it relates to treating the practice of human resources as a management function on the same par as business functional areas that promotes profit objectives for the firm. He also highlighted that due to today's organizational focus on strategic management, this focus has played a very important role on the impact of university HR education. However, there remains a prominent gap between the skills and competencies of students and graduates from these programs and the skills and competencies desired by organization’s executives. Kaufman (1999) stated, “Some of the most frequently cited shortfalls include skills oral and written communication, leadership, negotiation, understanding organizational dynamics, and having a strategic conception of HR” (p. 109).

Way (1996) conducted research to evaluate how the curriculum and courses has changed or evolved within the University’s educational paradigm. His research

corresponded with other research as it related to the correlation between the growth and changes of University HR curriculum and the changes within the HR structure of today's business environment. Way's (1996) study identified and highlighted that a number of university programs was showing a declining emphasis on industrial relations and focusing more on a business and strategic format.

Understanding the shift in emphasis in University HR curriculum programs is important not only to students but also to organizational executives. Way (1996) stated,

The increased orientation to HR means that for most students the programs are more relevant than previously. Curricular are also more useful because they are including more salient subject within HR, albeit slowly. For similar reasons, employers are likely to be more attracted to the graduates of these masters programs. Program administrators need to consider their curricula strategies carefully in view of the changes that are occurring. (p. 538)

In addition, he emphasized the need for University programs to frequently examine their curriculum and conduct frequent curriculum surveys and analysis by students and employers so they are growing and keeping up with the industry's needs. Due to significant studies and research on the relationship between HR practices and firm performance, Ramlall and Sheppeck (2006) analyzed a study by the SHRM publication authored by McFarland (2002). Along with his research, McFarland also combined various websites and University HR programs professional HR organizations and secondary literature. In the SHRM publication there were 127 HR related master's program including a description of the degree, degree requirements, curriculum, and other pertinent information (Ramlall & Sheppeck, 2006).

The business world and HR management education establish a tighter relationship in many instances due to the need for HR students and graduates to improve their

competencies in globalization, technological change, and new workplace requirements. The article articulates a statement by Dolezalek (2005) “the importance of management education in the business world is further exacerbated given that corporations budgeted \$51.1 billion for formal training in 2005” (p. 6).

The research revealed that the target core competencies in the master’s level HR programs were concentrated on the HR student’s strategic contribution and technical competencies. Ramlall and Sheppeck (2006) “these competencies were targeted through the requirements of specific classes offered by the respective programs. The emphasis is on HR strategy with the little emphasis on issues such as performance management, ethics, technology, and change management” (p.7).

The study emphasized that graduate HR programs can definitely achieve their goals in establishing and preparing a high functional HR student and professional when they achieve their goal of developing the relevant technical competencies in HR. Ramlall and Sheppeck (2006) stated,

Nevertheless, it is also evident that the HR to be a truly strategic business partner, HR competencies must be much broader than within the boundaries of traditional HR. Much greater emphasis should be given to developing broader business competencies to include all components of skills necessary to manage a business effectively in the global economy. (p.10)

Shrm.org identifies that SHRM is the world's largest association devoted to human resource management. The organization represents more than 250,000 members in over 140 countries; the Society serves the needs of HR professionals and advances the interests of the HR profession. The SHRM's CEO, Henry Jackson (2012) articulated

our core mission as a society for human resource management is to help you improve continually, succeed at every level of your careers, and have all the skills

and tools you need to serve your employers and employees. That's our number one priority and we honor it and everything we do. (p.12)

The SHRM's commitment to enhancing the competencies and skill levels of HR professionals prompted a serious undertaking in their research on HR education. In 2004, SHRM undertook a series of studies designed to define parameters universities are to use when creating or modifying a degree program in human resources. The SHRM's research resulted in the creation of the HR Curriculum Guidebook and templates; the SHRM's guidebook states,

In 2006, SHRM began working with universities to raise awareness of its HR curriculum guidebook and templates. The guidebook identified the minimum HR content areas commonly agreed upon by academia and, students and HR practitioners according to SHRM's research results that should be included in an HR degree program.

The SHRM.org/education/hreducation page acknowledged how SHRM focus on education became an important and critical component to helping secure the future success and recognition of the HR profession. The SHRM's goal in creating an HR curriculum guidebook and template was “to provide colleges and universities a comprehensive source for tracking HR curriculum that gives a common minimum skill set needed by employers who seek to fill HR professional positions.”

In order to add credibility to this guidebook and templates the SHRM established an alliance with the Association to Accredite Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). In addition, the guidebook template allows universities to examine their HR curriculum and assess their degree program. The SHRM works with colleges and universities to help and ensure that their school's human resources program is aligned with the requirements outlined in the HR curriculum guidebook. Certification and recognition are given to

schools that have been recognized by SHRM for establishing these minimal requirements.

The review of HR education in colleges and universities revealed that the curriculum and courses are gradually moving towards a more business perspective HR professional. However, there still seems to be a significant gap as it relates to the skills and competencies acquired by HR students in most HR programs as well as the skills and competencies desired by business executives, (Kaufman, 1999).

Kaufman (1999) also stated, “Universities, like business organizations, however, are off-base with the challenge of adapting to ever accelerating change. I conclude, therefore, that while considerable advances in HR education have been made over the years, considerable work still remains to be done.” (p. 109)

Human Resources Certification

Lengnick-Hall and Aguinis (2011) utilized a multilevel framework to assess what is the value of human resource certification. They asserted that there is no scholarly evidence regarding the impact of certification on many important individual and organizational outcomes. Their article distinguished between certification and licensing, described reported benefits of HR certification and reviewed existing literature on perceptions of HR certification. The authors stated,

Human resource certification is becoming a significant credential for human resource professionals. Its importance has paralleled the evolution of the HR profession from a more clerical and administrative function to one which plays a central role in helping organizations gain competitive advantage. (p. 246)

Licensing and certification both demonstrate an individual’s mastery of a body of knowledge; however, licensing is usually mandatory to enter a specific occupation

whereas certification is voluntary. Therefore the goal of certification is to help HR professionals persuade individuals that they have achieved a standard of knowledge, skill sets, and education. Some also viewed certification as a means of regulating a profession (Lengnick- Hall & Aquinis, 2011).

In reviewing the potential benefits of HR certification, Lengnick-Hall and Aguinis (2011) suggested that HR certification obtains many benefits for individuals and organizations. From an individual perspective, certification shows professionals have obtained an HR body of knowledge; they may receive public and personal recognition and recognition within their organization, which could result in promotions, increased income and status. From an organizational perspective, the benefits may include a possibility that certified HR professionals may perform better at their jobs and utilizing the HR certification as a hiring requirement may result in the recruitment of better qualified HR professionals.

To explore how HR professionals perceive HR certification, a survey was conducted within two large metropolitan chapters of SHRM totaling 189 participants. Slightly more than 50% of respondents reported that they were HR certified. The majority of respondents were responsible for both recruiting HR professionals and hiring them. When comparing the responses from certified and non-certified respondents who achieved a professional HR certification, certified respondents held a more favorable perception towards HR certification as a hiring tool (Lengnick- Hall & Aquinis, 2011).

Lengnick-Hall and Aguinis (2011) laid out 14 propositions for further research in HR certification. They asserted there has been a lack of documented research as it relates to the effectiveness and benefits of HR certification. They stated,

HR certification has potentially limited, what important role to play by increasing the HR knowledge of those individuals who enter the field from other areas and disciplines. However certification is unlikely to be an adequate credential for signifying readiness to perform higher level HR work, such as HR manager jobs or vice president of HR. (pp. 255-256)

The credentials most valuable to the role of senior level HR professionals are only speculative due to the lack of documented research in this area. The researchers believe there is a need to follow their research agenda utilizing the 14 propositions, which they have identified to build an evidentiary basis for identifying relevant background qualifications for HR professionals (Lengnick- Hall & Aquinis, 2011). Building previous research that examined the influence of organizational values on the behavior and attitudes of organizations and employees, Garza and Morgeson (2012) looked at an organization's use of HR certification and whether organizational members choose to pursue HR certification (p. 271). They used Toh et al. (2008) study, which identified three organizational values—innovation, people orientation, and stability. Garza and Morgeson (2012) stated,

Innovative organizations value employee risk-taking, competitiveness, experimentation, and leveraging potential opportunities. People oriented organizations value collaboration, information sharing, flexibility, and respect and tolerance. Finally, stable organizations value predictability and continuity. (p. 274)

Based on these three organizational values the authors developed five propositions.

Proposition 1: The use of HR certification and selection decisions will be higher in innovative organizations than in people oriented or stable organizations (p. 274). The authors believe that people oriented organizations are more likely to value HR

certifications on making selection decisions because HR certification signifies a given level of knowledge that distinguishes certified candidates from other applicants.

Proposition 2: The use of HR certification in selection decisions will be higher in people oriented organizations than in stable organizations but will be lower than in innovative organizations (p. 274). People oriented organizations strive to provide extensive training and development programs for the employees while innovative organizations may choose a strategy where the organization develops their own human resources. Organizations that seek predictability and stability often times may decide to train and choose their own candidates according to the organizations goals and priorities (Garza & Morgeson, 2012).

Proposition 3: The use of HR certification in selection decisions will be lower in stable organizations than an innovative or people oriented organizations. This is because organizations that seek to develop and make their own human resources may be less concerned with hiring HR certified professionals (p. 275).

Proposition 4: Innovative organizations will have a greater number of HR professionals that pursue HR certification then stable organizations. Innovative organizations utilize skill base pay and competitive knowledge to motivate their employees. Therefore, employees are more likely to receive higher recognition for HR certification, and innovative organizations may have a greater number of HR professionals that pursue certification (p. 275).

Proposition 5: People oriented organizations will have a greater number of HR professionals that pursue HR certification then stable organizations. This is because people oriented organizations are less concerned with initially selecting HR certified

professionals. However people-oriented organizations usually encourage HR professionals to continue their personal development and seek out HR certifications.

Proposition 6: Stable organizations will have a lower number of HR professionals that pursue HR certification than innovative or people oriented organizations. Stable organizations are less likely to motivate employees to seek out external development opportunities; therefore HR professionals are usually less likely pursuing HR certifications (p. 276).

The study revealed that organizations have different values that influence their value and perception of HR certifications. Garza and Morgeson (2012) proposed that the organizational values of the various types of organizations directly influence the perceptions of the value of HR certification.

Wiley (1995) explored some human resources professional certification issues by utilizing the survey of four HR associations, and identified the differences between licenser accreditation and certification. However, one of the most revealing areas or focus of her article identified the pros and cons associated with HR certification from an individual aspect, the company aspect as well as from the profession as a whole.

Wiley (1995) stated, “Professional certification has many benefits and drawbacks” (p. 280). The benefit of certification from an individual perspective is that certification requires an individual to demonstrate their own knowledge and abilities in the field. Demonstrating their knowledge forces an individual to prepare and study in order to exemplify their mastery of a body of knowledge. It also helps to establish public recognition for an individual, an increase in pay in many organizations, career advancement, and it also helps to instill a more professional attitude within a candidate.

Sustaining or becoming eligible for HR recertification encourages individuals to keep up with the body of knowledge and the changes within the profession.

Drawbacks, from an individual perspective as it relates to certification, many times are associated with cost and time constraints associated with obtaining a professional certification. Another noted drawback is associated with individuals spending a great amount of time gaining knowledge in one specific area and failing to enhance their knowledge and skills in other areas of the business organization. Wiley (1995) articulated that data from 91 firms found that HR professionals need competencies in three main areas of the business—human resources, business capabilities, and managing change. The HR certification does not stress competencies in business capabilities or managing change.

Wiley (1995) identified the benefits to the company is that “it is likely that organizations employing certified professionals will demonstrate better performance both within the HR function and companywide” (p. 282). Organizations may utilize certifications to identify HR organizations with knowledge proficiency and allow them to identify employees and job candidates with HR proficiencies. Wiley highlighted the utilization of certification and how they facilitate the selection and recruitment campaign to improve the likelihood of staffing HR positions with more highly qualified individuals when using certification as a criterion. However, a negative impact of the organization may occur when organizations subsidize individual’s seminars, workshops, and certification classes, but fails to see an increased value to the bottom line.

Wiley (1995) stated, “The certification process benefits the profession because it establishes the minimum competencies necessary for acceptable job performance” (p.

283). Certification helps a profession to establish an identified relevant body of knowledge. This not only helps with the practitioners professional roles but it serves as guidance for the development or modification of academic curricular. This process helped in the formation of the HR professional's competency model. It helps in the defining and measuring of competencies for all HR occupations (Wiley, 1995).

Because certification is not mandatory within the profession, this may explain why so many individuals fail to obtain this certification. However, those that sacrificed their time and finances to become certified reported a positive intrinsic value of earning the certification. They reported pride in national recognition and an increase in self-confidence. However, Wiley (1995) stated, "The merit of certification seems to be in the value that can be derived by each individual and by the value placed on certification by each firm" (p. 287).

("HR Certification: More in Demand by Employers,"2008) article articulated that certified HR professionals are more in demand by employers. The article stated,

One in two HR professionals say that hiring managers consider certification status when making interview or hiring decisions about HR department positions, according to Value of Certification Survey conducted by the HR certification Institute. (p. 9)

Many executives believe hiring HR certified candidates give their organization a competitive advantage. In essence, business leaders reveal there is a notable difference in motivation, knowledge, trustworthiness, and confidence from individuals certified in HR and their noncertified counterparts ("HR Certification: More in Demand by Employers,"2008).

Aguinis, Michaelis, and Jones (2005) focused on whether potential employers required or preferred human resources professionals who hold an HR certification. The article highlighted several professions in which certifications resulted in a higher level of marketability, which in essence resulted in a higher employment or promotion rate, as well as obtaining a higher salary level. This study was designed using elements of the signaling theory. The signaling theory provided a framework to understand why certifications, degrees, education, and other credentials were used as predictors in employee selection and assessment processes (Roth & Bobko 2000, as stated by Aguinis, Michaelis, & Jones, 2005). Aguinis, Michaelis, and Jones stated, “Earning certification in a particular field usually sends a signal to potential employers that an individual has mastered a specific body of knowledge” (p. 160).

The study highlighted the increasing visibility and promotion of HR certification as based on the untested assumption that being certified allows individuals to secure jobs more easily. Using signaling theory terminology, HR certification is marketed as a signal that employers recognize. However, although the HR certification was actively promoted and thousands of HR professionals have taken the exam, there was no evidence that indicated these assumptions were, in fact, true (Aguinis, Michaelis & Jones 2005).

Lester, Fertig, and Dwyer (2011) conducted research as to whether top organizational executives find benefit in having HR certified professionals in the organization. Their study compared and contrasted managerial perceptions based on whether the leaders themselves held certification. The authors acknowledged previous research noted that one of the benefits of professional certification was that it gives an individual guidelines and a roadmap for keeping up to date with professional knowledge

and practice. In addition, professional certification also endorses an individual's mastery of a particular body of knowledge in HR.

They also emphasized the recent 2010 study by the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI), which was designed to help ascertain the value of HR certification for both HR professionals and organizations. Lester, Fertig, and Dwyer (2011) stated,

The results show that 62% of US employer respondents and 82% of outside US employer respondents 1) consider professionally certified employees to have a strong impact on a company's profitability and 2) that most professionals and employers feel that the demand for professional certification in the HR field will grow in the next 3 to 5 years. (p. 409)

Lester, Fertig, and Dwyer (2011) not only wanted to find out if business leaders believed HR certification professionals provided value to the organization; they also wanted to inquire if the certification status of leaders influenced the benefits they preceded from having HR certified professionals. The results of this survey indicated that 90% of supervisors noted that having HR certified professionals on staff benefited organization. The leaders articulated that HR certified employees gave the organization more credibility, reduced the vulnerability to noncompliance, fostered more confidence and hiring practices, and allowed them to be more comfortable and confident in the HR department decisions. The authors relayed that one of their most impressive findings was that even though 90% of the leaders or supervisors indicated HR certification brought value to an organization, 61% of the sample themselves did not possess a professional certification of any kind and only 23% of the sample held certification within the HR field. It was evident that regardless of the supervisor's certification status, they perceived that HR certification adds value to an organization.

Summary

This comprehensive literature review was instrumental in helping to lay the groundwork for directing this study. The literature helped to highlight that the HR profession is ever evolving and organizations, executives, and HR professionals must work together to ensure the competencies needed for the 21st-century HR professional is not only revealed but achieved. In order for the HR profession to receive and obtain the needed competencies for organizations in the 21st century, there must be a comprehensive undertaking that includes the organizations to drive and champion HR development and excellence. Colleges and universities must continue their partnership with business organizations to ensure that their curriculum and courses are coordinated with the needs and challenges of today's business environment. In addition, the literature revealed it is imperative that HR professionals become more involved in their own professional growth, which includes involvement and membership in professional organizations, proactively working to obtain professional certification, and to be more involved in networking and mentoring opportunities. Due to today's complex business environment, it is imperative that business organizations, educational institutions, professional organizations, and individuals work together to enhance the competencies of the 21st-century HR professional.

Although the literature helped to highlight the ever-evolving profession of human resources, there is a gap in the literature that highlights the needs and perceptions from the executive human resources' manager's perspective. This study endeavored to illustrate a comprehensive look at an HR's executive's experiences as it relates to their

education, company training, and self-development. There was a gap in the literature that failed to show how each of these areas collectively and individually helped in their successful matriculation to HR Executive.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives are preparing HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

The research examined the executive HR professional's perceptions about a) the quality of their formal education, b) their organization's HR development and training opportunities, c) their participation in HR professional organizations, and d) their perceptions about obtaining a professional HR certification.

Research Design

The researcher used a phenomenological research design method. A phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. In essence, phenomenological study is used to gather information to understand the lived experiences of participants. A phenomenology research provides the study with a rich textured description of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009).

The specific phenomenological approach selected for this research was the hermeneutic phenomenological model, which utilizes the involvement of reading text and understanding the meaning and intentions behind the references (Moustakas, 1994). Kafle (2011) also noted that hermeneutic phenomenology demands an effort to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of the things as

realized by an individual (p.186). In essence it is an attempt to understand the world as experienced by the participant.

The utilization of a hermeneutic phenomenological method was appropriate for this study because it helped to obtain a better understanding of the executive HR's perceptions about a) the quality of their formal education, b) their organization's HR development and training opportunities, c) their participation in HR professional organizations, and d) their perceptions about obtaining a professional HR certification.

Utilizing this design helped the researcher get beneath the subjective experience of the HR professional and help the researcher find the genuine nature of things as experienced and realized by the participants (Kafle, 2011). The hermeneutic phenomenological method also helped the researcher better understand the texts and help to create a rich and deep account of the phenomenon (Kafle, 2011).

The phenomenological research study utilized a collection of data through an open-ended, one-on-one interview process. The one-on-one, in-depth, open-ended questions allowed the researcher to obtain descriptions of the experiences of the HR executives' perceptions as it related to their a) formal education, b) their organization's training and development opportunities, c) their participation in HR organizations, and d) HR certification. The collection of data also included the use of a tape recorder to ensure all of the information during the interview was captured.

This study utilized the Moustakas (1994) model of phenomenological analysis. The steps involved in Moustakas' analysis model include

1. The researcher reads through the transcribed data.
2. The researcher develops clusters of meaning.

3. The researcher writes descriptions of what the participants experienced.
4. The researcher uses the significant statements and themes to write descriptions.
5. The researcher writes a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon.

The rationale for the researcher's approach utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological design was its ability to obtain an understanding of the HR executives' perceptions as it related to their formal education, organizational development, membership in professional HR organizations, and certification.

Sample

Phenomenological research entails the researcher identifying the essence of the human experience about a particular phenomenon. This is achieved when the researcher studies a small number of participants through the process of a prolonged engagement to develop patterns of relationships and meaning (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2009).

Moustakas (1994) noted several phenomenological research studies utilizing 10 to 15 research participants. He noted Trumbell's study, which utilized 12-15 participants as well as Humphrey's study, which utilized 14 participants. Moustakas specifically noted "A good example of validation of data is borrowed from Humphrey's (1991) study" (p110).

The researcher set a sample of size of 20 participants. The researcher was interested in executive level HR professionals (director level HR professionals and above positions) who have obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

The sample frame was the executive level HR professionals who were members of the local SHRM chapter in Alabama. Each participant was in a current position of at least a director level HR position or above and had achieved at least a bachelor's degree.

The selection procedure focused on obtaining HR executive participants because they were seen as HR professionals who could articulate their lived experiences and perceptions of their formal education, work organization's development and training programs, their participation in professional organizations, and their perception of HR certification.

The participants were selected from the membership base of the local human resource's professional organization. The original sampling design was to utilize a snow ball sampling method, which Noy (2008) defined as when researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants (p.330). In essence, the researcher would first contact the members of the local SHM and inquire if they could or would like to recommend another HR executive who would be acceptable for this study. However the researcher was able to acquire enough qualified participants and did not need to use the snowball sampling method.

Sampling Process

The researcher partnered with the President of the local human resource's professional organization to obtain permission to send invitation letters and consent forms via e-mail to all of the members of the organization. The letter outlined the goals of the research and informed all members of the qualifications to participate. Interested and qualified potential participants were asked to call or e-mail the researcher in order for the researcher to send them a copy of the consent forms and other pertinent information.

Each participant that communicated willingness to participate in this research study was asked to bring the signed informed consent to the interview. The researcher however, also brought blank consent forms to the interview in case a potential participant failed or forgot to bring one with them.

Setting

Each interview took place in a private office setting to ensure confidentiality and comfort of each participant. The researcher was able to obtain an independent office space approved by the IRB to conduct the interviews. The interview setting was quiet, comfortable, and free from outside interruptions.

Instrumentation

The researcher used open-ended and focused interview questions for this study, and utilized his committee as the field test panel as authorized in the SOBT Research Plan Form. The committee was asked to review the prepared open-ended questions and anticipated follow-up questions so that the researcher could garner their input on its structure and ability to capture the information intended. They were asked to review the formal interview protocols and processes. The committee was asked for suggestions to improve the interview questions and follow-up questions. The suggestions that were given were implemented in the process.

In addition, even though pilot studies are generally not required for qualitative research, the researcher selected one participant that was not designated to be used in the research to participate in a pilot study. This ensured the questionnaire was utilized in the research study was both functional and applicable to the research.

The researcher interviewed a pilot study participant who had several years' experience as an HR director, which is within the same target group of the participants identified for this study. This pilot study allowed the researcher to test the instrument following the field study to ensure its effectiveness when used with the actual research study participants. The pilot study revealed the instrument was clear and concise and the participant was able to understand all questions asked during the interview process. However, the pilot study also revealed that additional questions could be asked during the interview process to develop a more in depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Additional questions were added to the questionnaire as a result of the information gathered during the pilot study, which help the researcher to gather more in depth experiences from each participant during the study.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized a formal interview process, which was field tested and approved, to collect data for this research project. During the interview process the researcher made sure to thank each participant for agreeing to participate in the study. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and reminded the participant or interviewee of the informed consent form, confidentiality, and interviewee rights. The participants were assured that care would be taken to ensure their privacy and confidentiality of all data collected would be maintained. They were informed that their names or the names of their companies would not be used in the study therefore, providing complete anonymity to all participants.

The participants were informed that they were free to decide not to participate in this study and that they were able to withdraw at any time. It was articulated during this

time to each participant that there were no known risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. Before the beginning of each interview participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns before the official interview process was to take place. If no questions or concerns were noted, the researcher informed the participant recording device was now being activated and the interview was to begin.

The following is a summary of the formal interview process steps:

1. Researcher contacted participant at least one day before the scheduled interview to ensure the participant was willing and able to come to the interview as well as ensure they were clear on the place and time the interview took place.
2. On the day of interview, the researcher greeted and thanked the participant for their time and willingness to participate.
3. Before the formal interview began, the researcher reviewed with the participant the Informed Consent and answered any questions the participant may have had.
4. The researcher then prepared for the start of the interview by first explaining the interview process and outlining how questions would be asked, the audio tape process, and informed participants that the researcher would be taking notes during this process. The participant then had an opportunity to ask any questions before the interview began and the audio was turned on.
5. The recording began and open ended questions were asked and follow up questions were utilized, such as *Please explain, Anything else?* or *Can you be more specific?* when more explanation was needed.

6. At the end of the interview, the researcher thanked the participant for their participation and informed them if there were any other steps in the process.

During the data collection process, the researcher was able to meet saturation. Saturation is reached when a researcher is no longer gaining or obtaining any new information or ideas from the selected participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). When the researcher has obtained sufficient information the data collection process can stop when the point of saturation has been reached (Randolph, 2009).

Data Analysis

The units of analysis were derived from in-depth interviews with qualified HR executives (HR director positions and above). The units of analysis were the perceptions HR executives had as it pertained to how well their formal education and the work organizations development and training have prepared them for their current roles or positions. The researcher also inquired about their perceptions as it relates to HR professional participation in HR professional organizations and obtaining an HR certification.

The researcher partnered with the President of the local human resource's professional organization to obtain permission to send invitation letters and consent forms via e-mail to all of the members of the organization. The letter outlined the goals of the research and informed all members of the qualifications to participate. Interested and qualified potential participants were asked to call or e-mail the researcher in order for the researcher to send them a copy of the consent forms and other pertinent information. Each participant that communicated their willingness to participate in this research study was asked to bring the signed informed consent to the interview. The researcher,

however, also brought blank consent forms to the interview in case a potential participant failed or forgot to bring one with them.

The researcher coordinated with each participant to agree on the interview place and the time that was most convenient for each participant. The researcher developed in-depth, open-ended questions and several predetermined follow-up questions to better help the researcher to obtain a more detailed description of the HR executives lived experiences.

Each interview was audio taped using two audio devices to allow for any interruptions or breakdown of one of the devices. The researcher's role also included the observations during the interview and taking notes to document the participant's facial expressions and body language during the interview process. All the data was collected and stored in a locked place.

The transcription process consisted of the researcher hiring a professional transcriptionist and obtaining a confidentiality agreement to ensure the confidentiality of each participant. In addition, to ensure greater confidentiality the recorded interviews did not include the participant's actual names, only their pseudonyms. The participant's current employer's names were also not utilized during the interview process to ensure their employer's confidentiality.

The transcribed data was read and reviewed several times to ensure the transcription's integrity. The researcher also read and reviewed the transcripts several times to become more familiar with the content of the information revealed in the transcripts. The transcriptions were also compared line by line with the raw data audio for accuracy. Two sets of transcripts were copied to be used as a master copy and a backup

copy as a secondary working copy. The master copies of transcripts were saved on a hard drive with the need of a pass code to access the transcripts. All interview notes and transcripts were prepared the same way to ensure consistency in the process.

The study's analysis process utilized Moustakas (1994) model of phenomenological analysis. The researcher first read through the transcribed data and highlighted the significant statements, quotes, and sentences that helped the researcher understand how the participants experienced the phenomena. This process was performed several times for each transcript to ensure all significant points were captured. Second, the researcher developed clusters of meaning, which were gathered from the participant's significant statements and quotes. Descriptions of what the participants experienced were written utilizing the significant statements and themes which were previously identified. The significant statements and things were also used to write a description of the setting that is not how the participants experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then used the compiled information to write a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon.

The findings and meanings of the analysis were presented in a data display utilizing narrative text. The researcher presented the results in a descriptive narrative form. Thick descriptions were the avenue for communicating the big picture of the lived experiences of the HR executive.

Credibility

To address credibility the researcher used qualified participants to gain knowledge and insight of the phenomenon. During the interview process the researcher used in-depth interview questions, audio tapes, as well as notes, which were used to notate facial

expressions and body language. The researcher also used a field test to ensure the credibility of the study.

The researcher helped to preserve the credibility of the research by utilizing triangulation or multiple data sources (Morrow, 2005). In order to sustain the credibility of the analysis, as well as the research as a whole, the researcher used the strategy of triangulation during this research study. Themes are revealed by researchers drawing on various viewpoints. In order to realize triangulation, the researcher used an experienced qualitative researcher from Oakwood University. The researcher agreed to review the raw data that was collected to determine if the themes the researcher identified were appropriate and accurate for this research. The researcher from Oakwood University also agreed to sign a confidentiality agreement to help ensure the participants' confidentiality. Triangulation was realized by using different types of data such as audio, transcripts, and researcher's notes that were taken during the one-on-one interview process. Morrow (2005) stated, "The more variety in the data sources one is able to obtain, the greater will be the richness, breadth, and depth of the data gathered" (p. 256). The study also included rich thick narratives, which were obtained from the interview process with each participant. The thick narratives and quotes that were obtained are displayed in the analysis section of the study.

Transferability

The process involved in this study is outlined in a detailed manner that will allow for this study to be transferred or duplicated with another population. The study is designed to gather rich descriptions of data interpretations. Extensive one-on-one interviews were conducted, which focused on the perceptions and experiences of HR

executives. Due to the processes used to ensure research credibility, this study should have transferability to other HR executives. Transferability can be accomplished when the inquirer provides sufficient detail about the circumstances of the situation or case that was studied (Schwandt, 2007). This study utilized thick rich descriptions obtained during the interview process to help ensure transferability, and also provided the reader with sufficient details about the circumstances of the situation to ensure research transferability.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the finding over time and an audit trail can be used to accomplish dependability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The audit trail can be seen as a log and detailed how data was collected and how categories were derived (Merriam, 2014). During the study, the researcher detailed and explained each step utilized in the data collection and analysis of this research study. The researcher also detailed the steps used in how each category was derived. To ensure consistency and dependability, the researcher also followed the same procedures for all participants throughout the research study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the internal coherence of the data in relation to the findings, interpretations, and recommendations. The audit train can also be used to accomplish confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher detailed how the data was collected and how the data alone was used in the establishment of the categories and analysis. The researcher provided the reader with rich thick descriptions of the data

to give the reader adequate information on the establishing of the categories and the overall finding of the research which helped the researcher to show confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting human subject research studies it is important to follow the ethical guidelines that have been established by the Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 45, part 46 (45 CFR 46). Capella University requires that as a researcher I follow the “Common Rule,” which outlines the main concerns regarding human subject research and ways to ensure ethical outcomes.

There are various concerns during research with human subjects. First, the research should seek to “do no harm,” similar to the Hippocratic Oath for doctors. The ethical guidelines a researcher follows have to do with his perspective discipline. Most important to remember is the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. According to Babbie (2007) “The clearest concern in the protection of the subjects’ interests and well-being is the protection of their identity” (p. 64). Research is conducted to further understand a specific phenomenon; the personal identity of the respondent is not required. Another important factor of ethical research is that the participation is totally voluntary. Respondents were not bribed, chided, or coerced to participate in this study. Lastly, the respondents were given a brief background of the study and were able to “consent” to the process.

For this study the researcher utilized volunteers and informed consent forms were available for each potential candidate. The real names or identifying characteristics of each participant were not used in the study. Each participant received an alternative name, and only the researcher knew the true identity of the participant. In addition, the

companies or organizations in which the participants worked were also not identified. The audio and transcripts were secured in a locked location. In addition, all participants for this study had a commitment to justice, which ensured a fair distribution of risk and benefits resulting from this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 reviewed and explained the outline of the researcher's approach and methodology utilized in this research study. The qualitative approach utilized in this study was from a phenomenology perspective. A phenomenology research provides the study with a rich textured description of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009).

The specific phenomenological approach selected for this research was the hermeneutic phenomenological model, which utilizes the involvement of reading text and understands the meaning and intentions behind the references (Moustakas, 1994). Kafle (2011) also noted that hermeneutic phenomenology requires an effort to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of the things as realized by an individual (p.186). In essence it is an attempt to understand the world as experienced by the participant.

The sample frame was the executive level HR professionals who were members of the local human resource's professional organization. This is the local organization located in Alabama. Each participant was in a current or former position of at least a director of HR and has obtained at least a bachelor's degree. This section also described the confidentiality protocols and how each participant was ethically treated.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives are preparing HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. This chapter discusses the data findings identified during this study and is divided into two sections. The first section describes and introduces the participants interviewed in the study and offers a summary of the data collected. The second section describes and reveals the primary themes that were identified in an attempt to understand whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives prepare HR professionals in the field with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of executive level HR professionals towards their formal education, organizational development and training programs, and their own self-development?

The question helped the researcher assess how HR executives understand the ways in which their training has given them the required skills needed for the role of business partner in today's organizations. The research question aided and helped to guide the researcher's open-ended interview, which used HR-related questions in an

effort to understand the HR executives' perspectives regarding their formal education, their organizational development and training programs, and their own self-development.

Participant Demographics

The participants were executive HR level professionals who are members of the local human resource's professional organization located in Alabama. Each participant held a position of HR director or higher and had obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

The researcher partnered with the President of the local human resource's professional organization to obtain permission to send invitational e-mails to all of the members of the organization. The letter outlined the goal of the research and informed all members of the qualifications to participate.

Twenty executive level HR professionals were identified consisting of 14 female and 13 male participants. Participants ranged from 35 years of age to 67 years. Their HR experience ranged from two years to 40 years of experience. The participants' years in their positions ranged from six months to 16 years. The participants had various HR titles; however, the majority of the titles were either director of HR or HR director, a reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Name	Sex		Age	HR Exp	Years in Position	Title of Current Position
	M	F				
Bill	x		52	10	5	Director of Human Resources
Bobby	x		53	27	3	HR Director
Brandy		x	49	20	6 months	Chief Human Resource Officer
Carver	x		58	32	19	Vice President of HR
Darlene		x	62	40	6.5	Director of HR
David	x		60	19	5	Director of HR
Doll		x	67	18.5		Director of HR
Helen		x	50	20	16	Director of Operations and HR
Jaws		x	52	14		Director of HR

Name	Sex		Age	HR Exp	Years in Position	Title of Current Position
	M	F				
Joe		x	47	17	16	HR Director/Chief Resource Officer
Julia		x	49	24	8	Dir of Talen Mgmt. & Org effectiveness
Lola		x	48	7	7	Director of Internal Communication & HR
Mary		x	55	29	1	Director of HR
Queene		x	42	23	1	Director of HR
Sam		x	48	25	6	Director of HR
Sampson		X	53	30	6	Director of HR
Sandy	X		35	2	9	HR Executive
Susan		X	48	19	2	Associate VP of HR
Tammy		X	59	16	9	Director of Employee Development
Troy	X		53	28	4	Director of HR
Total	6	14				
Percent	30%	70%				

Note. Exp = Experience, HR = Human Resource, Mgmt. = Management, Org = Organization

Participants' Data Description

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the qualitative value of the interviews in this research study, the researcher devised a short narrative of each participant. The names that appear in this research study are pseudonyms for each participant. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and confidentiality of each participant.

“Bill”

Bill was a 52-year-old male with 10 years of HR experience. He was a director of human resources, a position he had held for the past five years. Bill completed a Bachelor's of Science in business and marketing and acquired a Master's of Human Resource Management. He believed his Bachelor's of Science allowed him to acquire the quantitative foundational skills, such as finance and economics, which helped him to

understand the business side of HR. His Master's of Human Resource Management helped him to understand the technical aspects of HR. Bill was a member of the local and national HR professional organizations and held positions at the local level. He was also a certified HR professional.

“Bobby”

Bobby was a 53-year-old male who had 27 years of HR experience and was a human resources director; he held this position for the past four years. Bobby completed a Bachelor's of Business Administration. His formal education was not HR focused, but his business administration concentration helped him to understand some of the intricacies associated with the business aspects of HR. He was a member of both the local and national HR organizations and believed it is imperative that HR professionals participate in these organizations to enhance their body of knowledge within the HR profession. He had an HR professional certification and believed having a certification is a benefit for HR professionals.

“Brandy”

Brandy was a 49-year-old female with 20 years of HR experience and was a chief human resource officer for the past five months. Brandy's educational achievements included an associate's degree; a Bachelor's of Computer Science, and a Master's of Business Administration, with a concentration in Human Resources and Workforce Education. She believed her undergraduate degrees helped her to understand the theories about organizational development and prepared her to effectively develop training for the adult learner. However, she believed her MBA helped her to become a more operational and strategic HR professional. She was a member of the local and national HR

professional organizations and believed it is important for HR professionals to utilize HR professional organizations to enhance their networking and relationship building. She strongly believed in HR professional certifications; she was a certified training specialist and had acquired her PHR and EEO certifications.

“Carver”

Carver was a 58-year-old male with 32 years of HR experience. He was a vice president of human resources; he had maintained this position for the past 19 years. His educational achievements included a Bachelor’s in Art History and a Master’s in Human Resource Management. He believed his masters have given him a strong understanding of the strategic proponents of human resource management. He believed participation and HR professional certifications allow HR professionals the opportunity for networking and remaining current and relevant in HR. He achieved his HR certification, which he believes is an asset for any HR professional.

“Darlene”

Darlene was a 62-year-old female with 40 years of HR experience. She was a director of human resources for the past 6 ½ years. Her educational accomplishment included a Bachelor’s of Business Administration and a Master’s of Human Resource Management. Her business degree helped her to gain business acumen knowledge needed in human resources and her masters enabled her to understand the theory, laws, and philosophical aspects of HR. She felt it is very important and beneficial for HR professionals to be aligned or associated with an HR professional organization. She was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce HR Roundtable (professional HR club for

upper-level HR professionals). She acquired a professional HR certification and believed her certification demonstrates that she has the knowledge required for today's HR professionals.

“David”

David was a 60-year-old male with 19 years of HR experience. He was a director of human resources for the past five years. He earned a Bachelor's of Business Administration. He was a member of the local and national HR professional organizations. He stated, “If you are really dedicated and you want to progress as a professional, you have to be part of a professional organization.” He acquired a professional HR certification and felt it's a challenge for an HR professional to present themselves as professional without a professional certification.

“Doll”

Doll was a 67-year-old female with 18½ years of HR experience. She was a director of human resources. Her educational achievements included a Bachelors of Secretarial Science with a minor in Business and Secondary Education. Her minor and education helped her to better understand the training aspects associated with HR. In addition her minor in Business Administration helped her better understand the aspects of HR. She was a member of the local and HR organizations and believed her association with these professional organizations to be beneficial. She did not hold the HR professional certification, but she believed the certifications make an HR professional more marketable.

“Helen”

Helen was a 50-year-old female with 20 years of HR experience. She was the director of operations and HR. She received a Bachelor’s of Accounting. She strongly believed her accounting degree to be a major reason for her understanding of the business side of HR because it allowed her to understand the business associated with payroll, benefits, and fringe benefits. She articulated that many of her HR decisions were also associated with accounting and understanding the financial bottom line. She not only became a member of a local professional HR association, but she also held a position within the organization. She acquired her HR certification and believed that certification gives professionals credibility within the HR field.

“Jaws”

Jaws was a 52-year-old female with 14 years of HR experience. She was a director of human resources. Jaws educational accomplishments included a Bachelor’s of Science in Telecommunications and a Master’s of Human Resource Management. She did not believe her business classes in her undergraduate degree helped her in her current job. However, she believed her masters provided her with a good foundation and prepared her for ongoing on-the-job educational experiences. Jaws believed it is almost necessary for HR professionals to be part of a professional organization because the experience gave them the opportunity to network, to learn from peers in the field, to remain current on HR practices in challenging situations, and to gain overall exposure to the industry. She believed HR certifications may look good on the resume, but that didn’t mean the HR professional was better qualified than one who had not received their HR certification.

“Joe”

Joe was a 47-year-old female HR professional with 17 years of HR experience. She was an HR director/chief resource officer. She completed a Bachelor’s of Foreign Languages. She articulated her degree in foreign languages may not have been business focused, but it assisted in her HR career by helping her better understand and communicate with individuals of different cultures and backgrounds. She has been part of a local HR professional organization and sees its benefits. She also held positions on the legislative advocacy team within the local chapter. Through her experience, she believed HR certification helped to give an HR professional confidence and enhances credibility.

“Julia”

Julia was a 49-year-old female HR professional 24 years of HR experience. She was the director of talent management and organizational effectiveness. She received a Bachelor’s in Human Resource Management and Industrial Labor Relations. She completed her bachelor’s several years ago and stated, “When I went to college there was really little preparation for my current role.” She believed although she received a Bachelor’s in Human Resource Management, the courses were primarily geared towards the administrative function of HR and was not really a strategic kind of educational program. Julia found some value in being part of the local HR organization, but believed it focuses too much on the administrative side of HR. She received her professional HR certification, but does not believe it helped her to become a better HR professional.

“Lola”

Lola was a 48-year-old female HR professional with seven years of HR experience. She was a director of internal communications, which includes HR. Her highest level of formal education was a Bachelor’s of Business Administration. She believes her business courses were strategically focused. Lola saw value in the local HR professional organization, especially as it related to understanding how other HR professionals resolve complex HR issues and the ability to network and build relationships with local HR executives. She had her HR certification and believed it gives her a competitive edge over others who had not completed or received their HR certification.

“Mary”

Mary was a 55-year-old female HR professional 29 years of HR experience. She was a director of human resources and earned a Bachelor’s in Management and Technology. She revealed that her computer and technology background is what helped her transition to the HR profession. According to Mary, as it related to participation in HR professional organizations, seasoned HR professionals should be looking to improve their skills, as well as mentoring less experienced HR professionals. She believed the HR certification demonstrated that a person has acquired a broad breath of knowledge as it relates to the field of HR.

“Queen”

Queen was a 42-year-old HR professional who accumulated 23 years of HR experience. She was an HR director. Her educational achievements included a Bachelor’s and Master’s of Human Resource Management. She explained that her

education prepared her for the real world of HR by first participating in an internship and being able to take classes from experienced professors. Queen explained it is absolutely necessary for HR executives to participate in local and national HR professional organizations because they help to keep HR professionals abreast of the changes and updates related to the world of HR. She did not hold her HR certification, but she believed it's necessary when evaluating the competencies of HR professionals.

“Sam”

Sam was a 48-year-old female HR professional with 25 years of HR experience. She was a director of HR and completed her Bachelor's in Management/Human Resource Management and a Master's of Human Resources Development. Her undergraduate degree in human resource management focused more towards the administrative components of HR. However, her master's degree had more of a strategic focus, which gave her a broader business view of HR. Sam believed one of the important factors of belonging to a HR professional organization is the fact that the higher up a person goes is not about *what* the person knows, but who they know. These professional organizations allow the opportunity to network and build relationships. Sam acquired her HR certification and believes it separated her from those without a certification. She stated, “I would not have had my last few jobs if I did not have a certification.”

“Sampson”

Sampson was a 53-year-old female HR professional with 30 years of HR experience. She was a director of human resources and held this position for the past six years. Her educational accomplishments included a Bachelor's in Communications and a Master's in Business Administration. She believed both her undergraduate and graduate

degrees were very beneficial in preparing her for her current position. She articulated that the resources available through the national and local SHRM organizations were very valuable for her and her staff; the membership helped her to maintain visibility regarding what was happening not only in her company but in the HR profession. She was an HR professional who received her professional certification and believed it is a demonstration of a level of proficiency; it is a demonstration of someone taking the time and effort to verify they have acquired the body of knowledge required for the job.

“Sandy”

Sandy is a 35 year old male HR professional who has two years of HR experience. He is currently the HR executive for his organization. He has acquired outstanding educational accomplishments, including Bachelors in Industrial Engineering a MBA, a law degree specializing in employment law and a Doctorate in General Management. He articulated during his educational journey, he has never taken a particular class solely designed as a HR course. He states, “I don’t know if today there’s a formal education that can actually help you to become a good HR executive”. Sandy says he doesn’t believe in certifications. He feels it is just something you can put on your resume just to impress people. He believes it is just something that allows people to check a box and say I have completed that.

“Susan”

Susan was a 48-year-old female HR professional with 19 years of HR experience. She was an associate vice president of human resources and held this position for the past seven years. Her educational accomplishments included a Bachelor’s of Accounting and a Master’s in Human Resource Management. Her accounting degree helped her to

become more analytical and methodical, which were skills she was able to utilize in her human resources role. Her master's degree was a tremendous learning opportunity in which she was able to focus more specifically on HR and understand her HR role from a more strategic perspective. She believed the participation in an HR professional organization was absolutely essential. She asserted participation is how professionals are able to be involved, learn, and grow in their roles as HR professionals. She had her HR certification and was a strong advocate for professional certification.

“Tammy”

Tammy was a 59-year-old female HR professional with 16 years of experience. She was a director of employee development, and had held position for nine years. Her educational experience included a Bachelor's in Education. She believed her degree in education gave her a great foundation as a Director for Training and Development. She asserted that, for small organizations, it was imperative for HR executives to participate in external HR professional organizations. These alliances give them the networking and educational experience and are vitally important to their success.

“Troy”

Troy was a 53-year-old female HR professional with 28 years of experience. She was the director of human resources and has held this position for the past four years. Her educational accomplishments included a Bachelor's of Business Administration. She believed her business administration degree has given her the knowledge to see the organization from a broad perspective and to think strategically. She believed in HR professional's participation in a professional HR organization because it helps to keep the HR professional current updates and policies related to the HR profession. Troy is a

certified HR professional who believes certification helps an individual to acquire knowledge from a broad range of HR competencies.

The data presentation of each participant also included each participant’s educational achievements. All 20 participants (100%) completed at least a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher learning. Ten participants (50%) completed a master’s degree and two participants (10%) completed a PhD at an accredited institution of higher learning. In addition, one participant who completed their PhD also completed a law degree. Only four participants (20%) actually received an undergraduate degree with a concentration in human resources. business administration was the largest concentration, which consisted of six participants (30%). Two participants (10%) received their concentration in accounting, one (5%) in art history, one (5%), secretarial science, one (5%), telecommunications, one (5%), foreign languages, one (5%), management of technology, one (5%) communications, one (5%) industrial engineering and one (5%) in education. There were six participants (30%) who completed their Masters in Human Resource Management, three participants (15%) who completed an MBA, and one participant (5%) who completed their Masters in Human Resources Development. Two of the participants (10%) also completed a PhD with a concentration in general management. This data is represented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Educational Achievements*

Name	Education			Concentration		
	BA	MA	PhD	BA	MA	PhD
Bill	x	x	x	Business/Marketing	HRM	Mgmt.
Bobby	x			Business Administration		
Brandy	x	x		HRM /Workforce Education	MBA	
Carver	x	x		Art History	HRM	
Darlene	x	x		Business Administration	HRM	

Name	Education			Concentration		
	BA	MA	PhD	BA	MA	PhD
David	x			Business Administration		
Doll	x			Secretarial Science		
Helen	x			Accounting		
Jaws	x	x		Telecommunications	HRM	
Joe	x			Foreign Languages		
Julia	x			HRM and Labor relations		
Lola	x			Business Administration		
Mary	x			Mgmt. of Technology		
Queene	x	x		HRM	HRM	
Sam	x	x		HRM	HRD	
Sampson	x	x		Communications	MBA	
Sandy	x	x	x	Industrial Engineering	MBA	Mgmt./ Law
Susan	x	x		Accounting	HRM	
Tammy	x			Education		
Troy	x			Business Administration		
Total	20	10	2			
Percent	100%	50%	10%			

Notes. For BA = Bachelors, MA = Masters, PhD Doctor of Philosophy, HRM = Human Resource Management, MBA = Masters of Business Administration, HRD = Human Resources Development, Mgmt. = Management

Interview process

All of the interviews were conducted in a quiet office environment in which there were no interruptions. The researcher utilized two digital audio recorders to allow for any interruptions or breakdown of one of the devices.

The phenomenological research study utilized a collection of data through an open-ended, one-on-one interview process. The one-on-one, in-depth, open-ended questions allowed the researcher to obtain descriptions of the experiences of the HR executives perceptions as it relates to their formal education, their organizations training and development opportunities, participation in HR organizations, and HR certification.

Data Collection Process

The data collection method for this research was the one-on-one in-depth interview process. The type of data generated was a voice recording utilizing an audio recorder and the researcher took notes during the interview to notate body language and facial reactions, which could not be captured by the audio tape. The audio data was transcribed and typed. The qualitative approach utilized in this study was from a phenomenology perspective. A phenomenology research establishes to acquire and provide the study with a rich textured description of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009).

This study utilized the Moustakas (1994) model of phenomenological analysis.

The steps involved in Moustakas analysis include:

1. The researcher reads through the transcribed data.
2. The researcher develops clusters of meaning.
3. The researcher writes descriptions of what the participants experienced.
4. The researcher uses the significant statements and themes to write descriptions.
5. The researcher writes a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon.

Utilizing these five steps from the Moustakas (1994) analysis steps, six themes were identified. They were a) Educational Preparedness, b) Careers, c) Organizational Development Opportunities, d) Benefits of Membership in Professional HR Organizations, e) Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness, and f) Certification Perspectives.

Theme 1. Educational Preparedness

This theme was closely aligned with the purpose of the study as it related to the evaluation and examination of colleges and universities, quality of education, and preparing individuals for the HR field. The data collected shows 13 (65%) participants revealed that their undergraduate degree helped to prepare them for their current position. Six participants (30%) revealed their undergraduate experience did not actually prepare them for their current position. Ten participants received a master's degree as part of their educational achievements and nine participants (90%) revealed that their master's degree played a great role in preparing them for their current position. Two participants completed a PhD in management and one (50%) revealed the information he received in the studies were beneficial in preparing him for his current position. However, one participant (10%), Sandy, revealed, "I don't know if today there's a formal education that can actually help be a good HR executive. I think the things needed are really experience over education." Therefore, he did not reveal that any degree prepared him for his current position in HR.

In educational preparedness, data collection also included data associated with the participants' perceptions concerning their college degrees focus as it related to an administrative or strategic focus. Ten participants (50%) revealed their undergraduate degrees were primarily administratively focused and 10 participants (50%) revealed their undergraduate degrees were primarily strategic focused. All 10 participants (100%) who achieved a master's level degree and both participants (100%) who received their PhD in management revealed that their graduate degrees were primarily focused towards the strategic areas of business. The theme of educational preparedness also revealed some of

the participants' perceptions towards classes, which they felt would have better prepared them for their HR careers. Three participants (15%) would have better prepared with human resource management classes, one participant (5%) emotional intelligence, one participant (5%) in law, one participant (5%) in coaching, three participants (15%) in strategic planning, one participant (5%) in writing, one participant (5%) in leadership, and one participant (5%) in strategic management. These details are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Educational Preparedness*

Categories	
Undergraduate	Frequency (N=20) and Percentage
Degree prepared you for current position	13/65%
Degree did not prepare you for current position	6/25%
Degree had administrative focus	10/50%
Degree had strategic focus	10/50%
Master Degree	Frequency (N=10) and Percentage
Master Degree prepared you for current position	9/90%
Master Degree did not prepared you for current position	1/10%
Degree primarily focus on strategic areas	10/100%
Doctoral Degree	Frequency (N=2) and Percentage
Doctoral Degree prepared you for current position	1/50%
Doctoral Degree did not prepare you for current position	1/50%
Doctoral Degree focus on strategic areas	2/100%

Note: Frequency equal number of participants at that degree level

This section reveals the participants' organized narratives and many direct quotes, which were used to help capture the participants' lived experiences. These narratives expressed the participants' feelings as they described their educational experiences.

Bill revealed,

During my bachelors, I had no interest in HR so I took many courses, which concentrated on the quantitative aspects of business. For my master's in Management I focused a lot on business finance, and a lot in economic courses. Therefore, for me it was my interest in quantitative parts that helped me figure this out. My Master's in Human Resources Management helped me understand

the technical aspects of HR because an operations person can come in, but rather I am saying the technical aspects of HR and there are some laws and rules and regulations that do not necessarily enhance productivity or help do the employee relations peace that management is required to do. However, you have to understand what those technical issues are. So I think that the Master's in Human Resource Management helped to prepare me for some of the technical pieces that came out from HR. The Master's in Management and the undergraduate degree prepared me for the strategic operational pieces and understanding what the bottom line was and what financial impacts. The doctorate degree helped me better understand theory but not necessarily gave me a better understanding of HR or my current position.

Brandy articulated,

Well my two undergrad degrees in HR and Work Force Education truly helped me to understand the theory with the laws about organizational development and overall management principles. Work Force Education prepared me for adult learning and how to be effective in developing training and merging training that will get a return on investment. So having that understanding helps me to be more strategic and operational. The MBA in itself helps me to not only talk from the HR perspective but from a business perspective because the higher level you go, they don't want to hear the warmth lofty people side, they also want to hear about the return on investment.

Carver revealed that his undergraduate degree, which was in Art History, did not do much to prepare him for his positions in HR. However, he revealed that his master's level degree was certainly beneficial as a related to preparing him for not only his current position, but his previous HR positions. His masters-level HR classes were related to decision theory, budgeting, high-level planning functions, and strategic management. So his graduate level classes clearly were beneficial in preparing him for his current HR level position.

Darlene said,

My undergraduate was in business administration and certainly had to do with an HR director's job. You have to have some business acumen, meaning you do budgets; you have to have some analytical skills so I think that it prepared me for the business side of being the director. The MBA also had some business sides but also had the human resource elements to it too that I didn't have that much of

at the undergraduate level. I do feel that it did prepare me because my MBA is a human resource management program; I took a lot of relevant business courses, law courses as well as just philosophy classes and also psychology classes that helped prepared me to do the job that I am doing.

David does not believe his education helped in his current position as it relates to understanding HR and how that plays into the business environment. When he graduated from college, he didn't recall any HR degree that he could have pursued at the time. He was more familiar with degrees like engineering or business, which he received. He believes his business degree helped him to understand the value of proper communication within the business environment. However, he does not believe his education helped him in his current HR business environment.

Doll stated, "It helped me understand the training side by utilizing my education minor and the business minor helped me understand some of the business areas of HR."

Helen said,

At first, I thought the degree in accounting did nothing for me in understanding HR. However, when dealing with payroll and benefits, I realized how understanding accounting helped me to better understand the cost effectiveness of compensation and fringe benefits. I was able to evaluate the cost of fringe benefits and total to the bottom line for each employee we hired. I realized then how the accounting and payroll functions were closely aligned with the overall HR functions. Therefore, an accounting degree did prepare her for her current position.

Jaws stated,

I do not believe the courses in my undergraduate helped me in my current job even though I had a minor in business because it was such a long time ago in 1984. My master's degree did help. The classes that I took, because of the degree of involvement, generally every class that I took you did group discussion so you were able to get a variety of different opinions on everything. You are able to really maximize your experience at that level. In addition, you get real answers as to what people utilizing to fix problems as they occur on a day-to-day level. So it really did help out a lot and as for me when I went back to get my Master's degree

I was newly into the field of HR. Not really prepared by my undergraduate degree at all. I had to call on a lot of people and ask a lot of questions.

Mary articulated,

Okay, well I don't have a degree in human resources. I have a degree in management of technology. And I got my Associate's degree in Computer Science and then went out to work for and fell into human resources. And when we talk about the administrative role of HR, especially 25-30 years ago, that's how I got started in the HR. And it was my computer background that opened the HR door for me. So when my personal life allowed me to go back to school to get my bachelor's later on. Management of Technology made more sense for me than human resources given my computer background. And so I think everyone maybe one business course in HR and well I haven't had formal education in any university setting for human resources. And so my formal education well hasn't lent itself to setting me up for success in human resources. My background, my certification, and just the opportunities that I have had in different organizations—that is how I have got into where I am.

Susan stated,

Well, it's an interesting question because my academic background at the undergraduate level is not in HR. I have an undergraduate degree in accounting. So I hadn't gone to school to prepare to be an HR professional. I had gone to school to prepare to be an accountant and so the back into my HR role. So at the undergraduate level I don't think I had, well I don't think I had preparation at all for HR beyond the fact that having an accounting degree taught me to be a methodical and analytical, which is skill that a lot HR practitioners don't have because they focus more on paper pushing as opposed to being analytical and strategic. So I think in that regard I had a little bit of an advantage. However, when I got to master's level that was really a tremendous learning opportunity because I was able to focus my learning more specifically on HR and at a strategic level as opposed to just administrative stuff. So from the undergraduate perspective, I don't think training helped me specifically in HR related duties, I think they help me just being more analytical and understand numbers in organizations. But at the graduate level and I also have my PHR certificate, so both of those really helped prepare me or being better at what I am doing now.

The study also captured several narratives of the participants' lived experiences as it related to their perceptions regarding which academic courses or concentrations they had not previously studied would have better prepare them for the field of HR.

Participant Brandy wishes she had been exposed to more courses dealing with soft skills, which she explains as the emotional intelligence aspects of HR. Because HR addresses all levels of people throughout the organization, if an HR professional doesn't understand what people are thinking and motivates them, that professional will not be successful. Brandy believes there is value in taking courses in psychology that address these issues and the theory behind why people do certain things, as well as the interpersonal aspects of behavior. For example classes that provide ideas on how to handle employees dealing with being abused at home or having a child with physical disabilities. These classes would help HR be more effective in dealing with these intricate and personal issues that ultimately affect the entire workforce.

Darlene states,

I wish I had more law classes, I think today in HR you have to have a lot more law classes. I think probably more coaching classes knowing how to handle people better, I think that would be better as well as some leadership classes. I think more leadership classes and there is all type of leadership, critical thinking, how to lead people, how to motivate, and all these leadership classes.

Doll articulated that she would have benefitted from more courses in strategic planning. In addition, she believes a concentration in HR would have helped her because she did not start out in HR, so if she had taken more HR courses, then she would have been better prepared.

Susan reveals she wishes she had an opportunity to take more writing and communication classes during her formal education. She believes it's critical for HR professional to be able to write, communicate, and think strategically. She wishes there have been more courses in that area and that more HR programs required additional writing and communication courses.

Theme 2. Careers

The data collected during this theme shows the participants strategic involvement in their current positions and whether each participant started their careers in HR or transitioned into the field. There were 15 participants (75%) who identified they did not start their professional careers in HR. Two participants (10%) identified they did start their professional careers within HR. Four participants (20%) identified with either falling into or accidentally getting into HR during their professional career. The data also revealed when explaining the strategic level of their current position. Four participants (20%) identified their current position was at least 70% strategic. Four participants (20%) also identified that their current position was at least 50% strategic, which they revealed as being balanced. One participant (5%) revealed 60% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 80% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 95% strategic, which was the highest percent recorded, one participant (5%) revealed 90% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 85% strategic, and one participant (5%) revealed 40% strategic, which was the only participant whose strategic involvement in their current position was revealed as below 50%.

In addition, there were six participants (30%) who did not reveal a particular percentage rate. However, they articulated that their current position was primarily strategic. Fourteen participants (70%) stated they were members of the organization's teaching leadership team and seven participants (35%) revealed they would've first hired HR members to be part of the strategic leadership team. Therefore, the data reveals that 50% of the participants who identified themselves as strategic members of management

are the first HR professional in their organization to be a member of the strategic leadership team. This data is captured in Table 4.

Table 4. *Careers*

Categories	Frequency (N=20) and Percentage
Reported their careers were not started in HR	15/75%
Reported their careers started in HR	2/10%
HR position part of Strategic Team	14/70%
First HR position in their organization to be part of the Strategic Leadership Team	7/35%

Note: HR = Human Resources

This section reveals the participants organized narratives and many direct quotes, which were used to help capture the participants' lived experiences. These narratives expressed the participants' feelings as it described their career experiences.

Participant Carver revealed he did two years in the military and came out in the Reserves. He then started working for a company in production and moved into HR by way of training because he had some training and education courses in college. He stayed in HR and eventually went back to school and got his Master's in Human Resources and moved up in HR.

Participant Darlene began her professional career as a plant manager's secretary in which she began assisting in basic HR administrative duties such as inputting employees in payroll and assisting in benefits.

David stated,

When the owner decided that the organization was big enough that we needed a formal HR department, he hired a Vice President and then he was looking for internal candidates that were interested in human resources. I put my name in the hat and moved through the interview process and started out as a Generalist and work my way up to the director level before my organization with another company.

Doll said,

When I came to the area, where I am living, I had applied for a position at the company where I work and they had a personnel assistant position, which I applied for and I had transferable skills. And so therefore after I was in the position for a while then I became the manager in the HR department. And then after that we had a couple of directors leave and I was doing the work anyway and so the director of the agency just promoted me into that position after it was basically posted because I was performing the functions and that's how I got into HR.

Helen stated,

I was a degreed accountant, I worked in public accounting for six years, and an audit client, government contractor as controller, hired me. When I went there they did not have an HR department and they said "Tag, you are it." Therefore, I knew about I-9s, knew about some benefits, and I knew about payroll. I called my insurance agent who dealt with these products that we brought from. And I said I need for you to come teach me HR, send every kind of booklet and everything that you have, so that I can read it, so I can then start working on that direction and first thing I started doing besides the benefits and payroll is when the workers comp, issue logs, then we operated in seven states and I went through in generated one application to be used in all seven facilities. I started bringing the project managers and CEO to have a meeting and the first meeting was with the insurance agent and a lawyer and me and we covered the legal side of why we should do this, the business side of why we should do this and now we had to start typing it down because these areas were starting to emerge and it was no longer just a clerk but it was becoming a direction that went in with business. It was type to my accounting.

Participant Jaws articulated "It was a good accident. When the HR position in my company became vacant, I presented myself to the Vice President of Operations and said 'I can do this, I know I don't have any experience, but I believe I can do this.'" She explained that she was a people person and she felt like she had watched and observed the previous two HR employees and believed she could do the job better. She was very convincing and they gave her the position. She immediately enrolled in school.

Joe stated,

I was in the military and I was a leader in the military and part of my job was personnel. So when I got out of the military, I went to the employment services and they saw that I had personnel management experience so they hired me as an interviewer. So, that's when I got, kind of my first stepping stone into HR, although it was more of helping companies interviewing, finding individuals, and recruitment mainly. And then about four or five years after that, I went into a temporary agency. I actually hired temp staff for people and so after five years of doing that, that was even more HR but not really the benefits administration. Then I got my current position and so it's everything. From recruiting to personnel management to benefits administration to the organization as a whole. I'm over maintenance facilities plus the human resource person and we have about 300 employee.

Participant Julia started her HR career as an intern who went immediately into management when her intern duties were completed. Her first job duties were more focused on the compensation and benefits aspect of HR. In addition, it also was about dealing with labor relation issues and resolving union grievances. It wasn't really administrative but it also would not have been considered a strategic role.

Participant Mary stated, "I fell into human resources while working in computer programming."

Participant Troy started at a company as a receptionist in human resources while he was completing his degree. He stated, "I more or less fell into the position while I was working my way up the different types of positions within this company." After he obtained his degree, he was promoted to a human resource's representative where he supported the company's recruitment managers.

In expressing their lived experiences as related to their HR experiences and their current positions, the participants provided the researcher with narrative data outlining

their experiences in becoming the first HR professional to be part of the strategic management team of their current organization with whom they work.

Participant Carver explained that in his organization, HR was typically viewed as administrative and rarely included in the strategic roles of an organization—unless the HR professional had the skill set and desire to interject themselves into a more strategic role of the organization. This was how he became part of the strategic team, by interjecting himself into the strategic circle of the organization and allowing them to see the value of HR being a strategic partner. His involvement in the strategic role came from him pushing it and not the company, seeing the benefit prior to his arrival.

Participant Darlene articulated that she is now part of the strategic team. However, she was unable to pinpoint exactly when and how it happened. She stated,

It just kind of evolved, I believe. It just seem liked the more you learn and the more value that you can add to the organization, it just happens because they come to you for questions, they come to you to get problem resolutions. So it just kind of happens when you insert yourself to be able to add value to what they are doing or the organization is doing every day. So I can't really tell you the way it happened, I can just tell you and this is only my fifth employer in my whole career. Worked a long time for one company and I would say you coming to different companies and they see the value that maybe they didn't have in their previous HR person. They start using you as a strategic partner in company.

Participant Joe reveals he believes he was the first HR professional to become part of the organization's strategic team due in large part to his leadership and the trust of his executive director. He honed many of his leadership skills in the military, which became an asset in his role as an HR executive. The leadership team saw the value in HR after it was revealed by the competencies and value Joe brought to the table.

Sam stated,

A lot of organizations do not see the benefits of HR on a senior level until there is a crisis. We had a very severe employee crisis in August of this year and professionally it was most difficult time of my whole working career. HR was able to navigate through this tense issue and bring back the support the organization needed to secure a positive light. It's through the difficult times that the organization sees real value and as a result, I was asked to now report to the President, I was asked to now become a member of the senior management team. I am now involved in every senior management meeting.

Susan revealed,

When I started my position in 2007, we were a completely administrative HR office. Everything was paper based, we were doing paper applications, paper everything, paper was everywhere and we were all wrapped up in this administrative work. All we did was process paper all day. Now fast forward 7 years, one of our strategic goals for our office is to be completely paperless office. So we are about 80% in the way there. All of our major functions now are electronic. So what that does is, it frees me up and it frees my team up to do more strategic things so we go out and we build partnerships and we ask how can I help you, we have something's that we can do for training and stuff. So we are migrating to a more strategic role but we still have some administrative components. But from my perspective I am doing more strategic work now as opposed to administrative work. Have you asked me this maybe 4 or 5 years ago, it would have been a different answer. But every year we are getting a little bit better. It was a push to be more of a strategic partner with the leadership team. As a matter of fact my boss, I report to the VP for Finance Administration and he tells me often I never knew HR people even knew what a computer was because his orientation about HR was that it was administrative and that we have the benefits paperwork, he didn't understand what an HR role could be and how much of a partnership we could have and so we really evolved not from anything to do with leadership. Last week he sent me two emails about two big issues we are dealing with and he said I am now going to be out of town for a week, I want you to look through this and when I come back I want your recommendation. That would have never happened 5 -7 -8 years ago, never. I mean we would have been not even included in the conversation about issues, we were told this is what's going to happen. But now people will send an email and say here's what's happening what do you think? So at least we are involved in the conversation, not every time they make decision based on recommendation but at least we have a part in the conversation now that never happened before. So its major progress because at least they see what we can do, they see the contributions that we can make, they see the value and then you know we matter.

Theme 3. Organizational Development Opportunities

Data collection related to this theme highlights what development and training opportunities are available to today's HR professionals. Participants identified the following types of training: Sixteen participants (80%) identified leadership and development training. Seventeen participants identified (85%) course type training. Eighteen participants identified (90%) seminars; 16 participants, (80%) workshops, seven participants (35%) identified mentoring programs, six participants (30%) identified cross training, and eight participants (40%) articulated they were able to decide on their own training program. In addition, three participants (15%) revealed their organizations pay for their formal education and some participants also revealed the most beneficial training which they feel they received from the organization.

Table 5. *Organization Development Opportunities*

Categories	Frequency (N=20) and Percentage
Leadership and Development Training	16/80%
Training Classes	17/85%
Seminars	18/90%
Workshops	16/80%
Mentoring programs	7/35%
Cross Training	6/30%
Self-selective Training	8/40%

This section reveals the participants organized narratives and many direct quotes, which were used to help capture the participants' lived experiences. These narratives expressed the participants' feelings as it described their organizational development opportunities.

Participant Bobby worked in an organization where HR activities were centralized along with the organizations support personnel. His organization was keen on

recognizing the importance of developing the skill sets of HR individuals. They had organized in-house training as well as training that was brought in from the outside facilitated by outside consultants. The training was very comprehensive and included various topics such as interviewing skills, interrogation techniques, developing a performance incentive plan, and diversity training. Bobby attended various conferences, which included the Franklin Covey management seminars and four-day executive seminars through a major university. His organization viewed and utilized training in a strategic manner.

Brandy stated,

I've been very fortunate that I've worked for organizations that provided some great work force development. So, for me, from a HR perspective, I've had companies that let me say "this is what I need" and they paid for it. They've paid for my certifications because they wanted me to stay current on what it was that I was giving advice about.

Participant Darlene articulated that her organization often have required classes that individuals must go to, which pertains to the organizations policies and procedures, or other internal changes. However, she states they are specialized development training for the executive level managers of the organization. The organization has external consultants to come in and work with the five member executive team. The training courses are designed to help the executive leadership team learn how to better communicate with each other and build a core trust within the team environment. It is important to always keep your training fresh because you cannot do your job without knowing what's going on in the field. Training is an ongoing process.

Participant David's organization requires mandatory training for those individuals who were promoted or hired into the management ranks. The training involved leadership

and management, which included how to administer disciplinary actions and interviewing skills. He believed it was good last training for all managers. He articulated that the training for leadership positions varied from organization to organization. In one organization where he worked, they offered little, if any, in-house training, but offered opportunities at other organizations. Plenty of money was set aside for the effective training of the organization's leaders. The training was designed to teach HR professionals how to become strategic partners with the other members of management.

Participant Julia revealed that the organization in which she worked had many types of last training for employees and managers alike. However, the organization's training was not designed to help HR professionals develop the necessary competencies to become a strategic partner within the organization. She developed her skills by voluntarily cross training in other departments and by taking on extra projects, which helped to develop her skills as an HR executive.

Susan stated,

I mean nobody saw the need for training because they didn't understand that HR could be something different. So everybody is getting paid on time and everybody is following human recourse policies. So they do not understand that there is a need for training beyond that. So all the training that we have done that I have gotten has been at my own request. I mean when I started at asking that can we have 7 habits trainings, can I do this training, can I do that training and lucky I have had a boss who has been very open about it and they say yes but it hasn't been at the institutions request or something they said they have to do it has been on my own request. So there is nothing that the institution has provided or has mandated that has helped me.

Theme 4. Benefits of Membership in HR Professional Organizations

The data collection for this theme reveals what benefits the participants perceive as being beneficial by becoming a member of a professional HR organization. All 20

participants (100%) were members of the local and national SHRM. Seventeen participants (85%) revealed the ability to network was a benefit and belonging to a HR professional organization. In addition, 3 participants (65%) highlighted professional resources were a good benefit. Eleven participants (55%) identified building relations as a benefit, four participants (20%) identified possible job opportunities as a benefit, and three participants (15%) highlighted a positive perception associated with those who belong in a professional HR organization. In addition, 10 participants (50%) also belong to other various professional organizations, as reflected in Table 6.

Table 6. *Benefits of Membership in HR Professional Organizations*

Categories	Frequency (N=20) and Percentage
Members of local SHRM	20/100%
Members of national SHRM	20/100%
Networking was benefit of membership	17/85%
Professional resources were a benefit of membership	13/65%
Building professional relationships were benefit of membership	11/55%
Possible job opportunities was a benefit	4/20%
Membership gave positive perception in business community	3/15%

Note: SHRM = Society for Human Resource Manager,

This section reveals the participants’ organized narratives and many direct quotes, which were used to help capture the participants, lived experiences. These narratives expressed the participants’ feelings as they described benefits of membership in professional organizations.

Bobby stated,

I think it’s important that those who have a body of knowledge and expertise share that for development of the HR profession and those in the community. I also believe that it is important that we will be out there and rub shoulders with, confront with, network with other HR strategic leaders to learn how their organizations are dealing with the same situations.

Brandy articulated,

I enjoy participating in networking organizations because you are able to network and interact with people there. Have similar backgrounds but sometimes they have totally different skills and experiences that help you with the issue that you're currently working on and vice-versa. I think that networking has been a powerful tool but also it's been beneficial from a professional perspective because many times higher level jobs are not advertised. Therefore, it is about you having built relationships with people to say, "Hey, John, you got this opening, I know somebody, Bridget, would be a good fit for that." You get to introduce John, you get their job and it's never advertised. Therefore, networking is key.

Participant Carver reveals he believes belonging to a professional organization is a good thing for any HR professional. He stated, "I think it's good for networking, it's good for staying current on things, and you meet a lot of folk out there."

Darlene stated,

I think it's very important. I think that been networking that you do through those organizations and things that you learn through some of their training, some of their programs that they offer are valuable because it is still part of your training to me. I learn a lot from those SHRM meetings that we go to. I just learn a lot from being there and just networking with people.

Participant David believed it is imperative to become part of a professional organization. He stated "We have to, if you are really dedicated and you want to progress as a professional. You have to be part of a professional organization."

Participant Jaws explains it is almost necessary for HR professional depart of a professional organization. It gives them the ability to get out and see how other people are handling problems that you may have had or will have in the future. Due to her networking and contacts through the professional organization, she has, on many occasions, been able to send an email or pick up the phone and receive valuable information on how to handle a particular issue in which she was involved. When her

Vice President asked how the organization should handle this issue, she had an answer to his networking and contacts within the professional organization.

Queene stated,

I think it is necessary. They keep us abreast of changes when we belong those national organizations. Okay, so you get the updates and things. And I think that a lot of times especially you would just add personally I get so busy, I think if I didn't have those updates here in my email every day something's might pass me by. So it is that in the resources, I really either depend on the resources from the SHRM sides many times. It is also another way to able to connect with other professionals. To be able to ask sometimes I do have an obstacle. I have a question that I know a serious matter and I really need some backup, I need somebody to say, hey, this is the way I would do it, this is the way I have done it and it's worked for me because she did have that ever changing something new every day that happens

Susan stated,

I think it is essential. I think you have to be involved. I think that is how you learn. I think that is how you grow. That is how you network. I say repeatedly in HR you do not have to reinvent the wheel. If you have got a problem that, somebody else has already dealt with it and already figured out the solution. You know get up there and network, learn from other people, figure out what is happening in your industry and changes that are coming down the pike so you should belong in professional organizations. I think its mandatory; you have to do that if you are going to be a good HR executive. I cannot imagine how you would be affected without doing that.

Theme 5. Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness

The data collection during this theme reveals how effective HR professionals view the local SHRM and national SHRM. It also evaluates whether upper-level HR executives feel organization exemplifies enough strategic training for upper-level HR executives. This section also reveals how HR professional organizations can be more effective. Five participants (25%) articulated that the organizations could be more effective if they facilitated more strategic training for HR professionals. Seven participants (35%) believed the organization can be more effective for upper-level HR

executives by instituting training and leadership courses designed for the executive level HR professional. One participant (5%) explained that breakout groups based on an individual's job title or interest would be more beneficial to many mid-level HR professionals because the training is focused on their particular domain. Only one participant (5%) believed that the local SHRM organization utilized enough strategic training for upper-level HR professionals. Nine participants (45%) articulated that the national SHRM utilizes enough strategic training for upper-level HR professionals. Twelve participants (60%) identified that participation in a professional organization has helped in their HR career or current position. Ten participants (50%) revealed that they currently participate with the professional organization on a limited basis. One participant (5%) revealed that they do not currently actively participate with the organization. Table 7 provides this information.

Table 7. How Professional HR Organizations Can Be More Effective

Categories	Frequency (N=20) and Percentage
Facilitate more strategic training for HR professionals	5/25%
Institute to training and leadership training for executive level HR professional	7/35%
Breakout groups based on job title	1/5%
Local SHRM provides enough strategic training for upper level HR professional	1/5%
National SHRM utilizes enough strategic training for upper-level HR professionals	9/45%
Participation in professional organization helped in their career	12/60%

Note: SHRM = Society for Human Resource Manager

To more clearly understand the participants' lived experience as they relate to their perceptions concerning the effectiveness of professional HR organizations, this section examines several participants' narratives and direct quotes responding to how

organizations can be more effective and what they would like the local SHRM do differently.

Participant Darling felt very passionately about how local SHRM could be more effective HR professionals. She stated, “They should have more emphasis placed on strategic HR and have more strategic speakers available.” In addition, she would like the local organization to design a program or course that would assist senior level HR professionals in acquiring the skills they need to become strategic partners in their individual organizations. Senior level HR executives not only need to know the competencies associated with being a strategic partner, they also need the ability to sell themselves and show their value from an HR perspective.

Participant Julia explained during her early HR career, she valued her membership in the local SHRM chapter. It was very beneficial to her growth as an HR professional. However, during that time, the SHRM’s training was more geared toward the administrative functions of the HR profession. For her, at that time it was helpful. As she moved up in her career, she found SHRM to be less beneficial. She stated, “The local SHRM has helped you a lot when you were going through your career and helping you better understand all the administrative tools and the administrative things that you have to do, but once you got into a strategic role it was less helpful.”

Many senior level HR executives participate less frequently in the local SHRM due to the same perceptions that they focus more on administrative functions and less on strategic competencies, which senior level HR professionals seek out at this time in their career. However, she felt senior level HR professionals should be willing to give back to

the organization and help to facilitate more strategic training for other HR professionals within the organization.

Participant Mary believed her organization needed to be more proactive in recruiting senior-level HR executives to participate in the local SHRM to ensure that they continue to have educated professionals ready to step into the next level. She believed the more exposure to senior HR level executives may open the eyes of HR administrators to understand that their job is more important than just making sure somebody fills in the right forms. She understood it may be difficult, because the more senior you are in an organization, the less time you have for outside activities.

Sam stated,

I think a lot of professional organizations need to focus more on strategic management training opportunities as well as networking opportunities for senior HR professionals. Sometimes senior HR professionals gets lost in the local HR organization because you have got lot of new young HR professionals and sometimes they feel like they don't get the same benefit as other organizations as a younger HR professional. I disagree with that because if you part of a professional organization and they did for you when you were younger in your career, yes you had that support at your level but at the same time, you as a senior HR professional need to be giving back and investing and developing younger HR people.

Participant Sandy believed a good way to make the local SHRM more effective is to segment the group. He stated, "I will look at the HR benefits administrator, the payroll people, executives, the recruiters, the organizational development people and have different groups." He believes many HR professionals would benefit from a more specialized training atmosphere.

Theme 6. Certification Perspectives

The data collection for this theme reveals the perspectives of HR executives as they relate to HR professional certifications. In addition, it reveals their preferences or perceptions regarding hiring a potential HR professional who possesses a Master's in Human Resource Management versus a HR professional who has acquired a Senior Professional in Human Resources Certification (SPHR). The data shows 17 participants (85%) acquired a professional HR certification. Seventeen participants (85%) believed a HR certification helps get a potential HR candidate in the door. Eight participants (40%) believed a HR certification reveals that an HR professional is learned in their field. Eight participants (40%) and HR certification showed that an HR professional is more prepared. Seven participants (35%) revealed that even preparing for certification whether you pass or fail helps an HR professional to acquire more knowledge in their field. When evaluating two prospective HR candidates, where one candidate completed a Master's in Human Resource Management, but has not acquired a SPHR certification and another candidate has acquired a SPHR but has not completed a master's level curriculum, seven participants (35%) revealed they would choose the master's degree candidate, while eight participants (40%) revealed they would choose the candidate that successfully completed the SPHR certification. This data is captured in Table 8.

Table 8. *Certification Benefits*

Categories	Frequency (N=20) / Percentage
Acquired professional HR certification	17/85%
Certification gets potential candidates in the door	17/85%
HR professional are perceived as learned in their field	8/40%
HR professional are perceived as being more prepared	8/40%
Certification prep (pass/fail) enhances HR professional knowledge	7/35%

Note. HR = Human Resources

To more clearly understand the participants' lived experiences as they relate to perspectives on professional HR certifications, this section reveals several participants' narratives and direct quotes responding to their perspectives and the benefits associated with obtaining a professional HR certification.

Bobby stated,

I obtained my senior PHR in 2004, after I had been in the HR profession for almost 20 years. Prior to that I was felt there was no value in getting it and many organizations do not require it. I came to work for present employer in 2004 they were in support of it and expecting that I achieve that within the initial time period of the first 10 or 18 months. I think what it does is the requiring that you continue stay fresh and abreast of things and continue growing your knowledge. That part is good. Whether or not that makes a difference how effective you are as a HR professional is another thing. I am just saying that designation doesn't mean necessarily that someone who doesn't have that designation is not as good or experienced. What that shows is you can be disciplined; you have gone through that rigorous process obtaining it and maintaining it. It has credibility but again they sent you variety of experience and knowledge that you present. Again someone who doesn't have the designation could be equal or better. So I see companies that mandate it. It helps but again ultimately I think for me personally if I were looking at candidates, I would look at their collective experiences and their success level and there level of strategic thinking as opposed to whether they have that certification.

Brandy revealed,

You need them. Again, it goes back to the perception of the people that are hiring you. If you have certifications, their perception is you dedicated the time and knowledge to learn enough to be able to pass this exam and then you are staying current. In addition, many jobs advertised now say that it is preferred, only a couple actually say it's required. But it helps you get within the door. And I have a couple of them because it's been beneficial for me; it shows that I'm learned in my field.

Participant Carver expressed that just preparing for the certification is beneficial to an HR professional. He encouraged his HR employees, no matter their position, to

prepare for and take the HR certification designation. It motivates HR professional to attend certification meetings and engaged and continuous learning processes. When he looks to hire an HR candidate, he prefers the candidate who has achieved the HR certification because it shows that they are knowledgeable and have some initiative.

Darlene stated,

I think that HR certification is kind of like a college degree. It proves that you have the ability to think and understand concepts and philosophies and it also embraces that you have a body of knowledge that you know about HR. So I think it's important. If I am recruiting for a person I am prefer that they have that. And I have recruited for one person recently that was one of the preferred things on there so it doesn't tell me that they know everything but it tells that they have the ambition to know the HR profession. So I think it's very important. I am still not sure that HRCI verses the new SHRM certification.

Participant David was very passionate concerning HR professionals obtaining their HR certification. David stated,

Got to have them. I mean how you can present yourself as a professional when you have no certifications. How can you get up and teach a class or lead a group? How can you do something like that you have no certifications, what gives you the right?

Jaws stated,

Personally, it looks good on the resume, but does not mean you are better qualified or your body of knowledge is better than the next person in line. I don't think so but the perception in the HR community says you have to have these certifications or you are not qualified for certain jobs. It seems, everyone who is hiring anyone in HR say you have got to have those certifications letters after your name or you're probably not going to be essentially considered for the position even though you may have years of dedicated HR service, you may just have your stacks of awards in class, certification, conference, training, I don't feel like it means what it used to mean. The reason I say that is a lot of people can memorize and are good to take information and start it. Do I know? Do I know the Body of Knowledge for HR? It could be, it could not be but I can memorize

what's in those books and I can read and get all the information. I think working knowledge is more attainable than testing because studies have found that you can put kids in high school or could take them in college level and they will (as I said) memorize whatever they are going to take on the test. (Rote Memory). Two weeks later the same kids could take the same test and not pass, because they were only preparing for the test, not working knowledge.

Joe stated,

Well, for years, I was scared to take my HR certification, because I was a homegrown HR professional, but I think it's essential in credibility. You know, you have to know your stuff and so I think it is, I think it should be required of anybody in executive level and I know that sounds harsh because if I had failed, I might not have thought that. I do think it gives someone a sense of credibility because HR, throughout the years we had knowledge but we were not looked at as being knowledgeable. I work in an organization where you have licensed therapists, and PhDs and doctors, MDs and ORs, everybody's got credentials behind their names and what that shows you is hey I have proved to somebody, when I took my test, or whatever, I proved that I have knowledge in that subject. So that's what I think certification does for the HR professional.

Quenne stated,

I think that it's necessary but some people might not feel that it's necessary. It's expensive to take the exams and it's expensive to do ongoing continuing education in order to be able to maintain your certifications, but I think that it's necessary out the ones that shouldn't be there.

Sam stated,

I think every HR professional needs to have it, because it separates you, separates somebody that's truly interested in his profession, interested in his career development and it also increases the opportunity for job growth in the future. Just because there are so many jobs out there that say you have to have a certification. You know I would not have had my last few jobs if I did not have certifications because both jobs had the requirement of certification desired or required. And so it's a very common thing that you see in most HR job postings today. So if you want to increase your networking capabilities and your future career, you got to have that certification. No one will go as far without it because certification communicates to business leaders and other HR professionals that you have a good well rounded knowledge of the HR function. And that's what certification does. It covers the 6 major competencies and the core areas of HR. so if you passed that certification, you are communicating that I have an understanding of the HR profession.

Sandy stated,

I was SPHR certified like 10 years ago and that was nothing but another check in the box. I mean it was absolutely a waste of time, and I studied the theory test, I took the test and it was a set of so many questions that I don't remember the details and it had so many hours to complete and it was like a standardize test. Memorize a few things and repeat it and then that was it. It had nothing to do with my capabilities as a HR person because those soft skills they were not measurable. It was really just to learn memorization of data period, rote memory that's it. A lot of times, I don't believe in certifications, it one of those things that you can put in your resume, you can put that on your wall and impress people. But it does not necessarily mean anything. So I probably have all the check in the boxes but I realize afterwards that it didn't really do a whole lot for me, it didn't making me a better professional.

Participant Susan was a great proponent of HR certifications. She encouraged her entire HR staff to achieve their certification requirements. She believed in every profession there some sort of certifications that highlights this person has done a little bit more than what was required and have a greater level of expertise. She thought certification was a valuable asset for any HR professional.

The next series of narratives and quotes were to better understand the participant's perspectives on their selecting a candidate with a Master's in Human Resource Management versus a candidate who has acquired a SPHR.

Brandy stated,

The SPHR tells me they don't only have the knowledge but they got the experience. Where somebody could have gone 5 years in college doing a Master's in HR. I'll tend to go towards the SPHR because I know that experience is there versus just education. But the other component out there that will really be real when it comes to interview is sometimes it's not about credentials. They've got to have the credential to get into the interview. It's about how they are going to fit into my culture, how we are going to interact. Are they using this as a stepping stone to get to the next level? You know all those things going to it but I'll look at the SPHR person because it tells me its experience coupled with knowledge versus just masters.

Participant Carver explains that this is a tough decision in choosing between a master's level candidate and a candidate who has achieved a SPHR. However, he would probably favor the candidate who has achieved a Master's in Human Resource Management.

Participant David believed the person who acquired the HR certification had a proven knowledge base. He stated, "They tested it, they had the knowledge base, and they tested successfully. I feel SP HR test is a better example or criteria for knowing the knowledgebase in HR."

Participant Doll explained that because the SPHR primarily focuses on certain areas of human resources and the master's degree probably has a more diverse curriculum and conferencing not only the areas of HR, but the business areas in which HR professionals need to understand. Due to broader range curriculum, she believed she would choose the master's level candidate.

Helen stated,

A degree gets you through the door. A person is going to certify specifically in that they really want that. The MBA that's a good concentration but they can also go different ways. You have to choose a concentration in MBA so you just may say that looks good. But if I were hiring for a position I would probably go with the certification. But I would want to see they have had some kind of schooling but I would be happy with being in there bachelors more so because the concentration in MBA. When I looked at it, it was three or four classes and you are concentrated. It is more general and just administrative strategic business, SPHR is specifically HR. so I would probably go for SPHR.

Jaws stated,

I am going to go for the one with the masters because that is a day-to-day, week-to-week process. The certification test is a one-time deal; it is a one-and-done. You read the material, you put it back down on the test, and you pass the test. Do you have more knowledge than the person that went to class, who interacted with

people? Because as you know in the masters field or basically whatever field you are going into, the masters level, there is a group practice. That means that this person can correlate and relate to other people, this person can work or we say can play nice with others, this person has the wherewithal to get up and get to class and pass. I am not so impressed (yes I do have the certification because you just have to have it nowadays) but what does it really mean? It means I took a test and passed it, it means that every year I have enough credits at the end of three years that I can re-certify. However, a master's degree means you have to get up and go into classes and pass multiple tests. You had to write many papers. You had to give plenty of presentation. You had to work in a group no matter what diversities were, no matter what or how you and the group got along, there is going to be a person in that group that you work in the classroom with 'oh my God it's a terrible day or why did you do this to me?' Because they were just that person that would have an itch in the middle your back that you could not scratch but for the sake of your grade, you learned how to modify your behavior to get on with them, to get what you were after which is what, a masters' degree. To me that sets those persons five steps ahead of the SPHR because they took one test and I do know people who have taken the test, who cannot even scratch your own back. To me, especially if you go back to school when you are living in the real world, you have real life issues, you have adult, things to do, and that to me sets you apart from the other person.

Participant Joe strongly believed in the certification process. He articulated that he would choose a candidate with the certification because a certification proves he has the knowledge. An HR professional may have achieved a master's in HR, but struggled through the classes and still received a master's degree. He has come to this realization because he recently interviewed a potential HR candidate who had acquired a master's degree in HR and she could barely answer some of the basic HR questions Joe asked her. He believed when you have a certification, it demonstrates you understand the major concepts associated with HR, and therefore he would choose someone was certified over an individual who has acquired a master's level education in HR.

Julia stated,

In the HR field master's now have more relevancies to the HR profession but also has more of a business perspective from a HR, it has business focus so it's got the finance, it's got the org effectiveness, and it's got that more broad perspective in

it. But also my perception of masters also provide more of a global perspective. Now PHR man changed, the PHR didn't really talk about business, didn't really talk about the financial implications, didn't really talk about the global perspective, if the man says you want to get the global perspective, you have to take the global PHR which I think is ridiculous. And again to me the PHR teaches you more about the laws, rigs than it does the business implications. Therefore, I would take someone with master's.

Lola stated,

I would have to go with MBA. It's a higher perceived level of education. A lot of people are going for HR certifications and have not completed a college degree. If you can do that, that's awesome, but if you have a master's you have done some hard core formal education.

Tammy said,

I will definitely look at the person that already had the masters because just like in my case I had that foundation of that four year education (especially if someone already has a master's), very easily they could come into organization and we could help them to begin the course study work and achieve the certification as opposed to them coming in with a certification and helping them to get a masters. I think it would be easier to facilitate them gaining the designation over bringing in somebody with the designation and then having to go back to college. I just think that the focus on having someone to do that, the amount of money that would be required would be more to the company than taking the one with the degree and then adding the designation on top of it. It would be easier, less expensive to get them to be a certified person than to get a certified person to become a master's level.

Troy stated,

I would probably gravitate more towards the person with BS and SPHR or PHR just because I know they have a broader base of knowledge with that certification based on what I know that has to go into having that certification. If everything else is equal, if they all had equal management experience and everything, I would probably go with the person that had a certification because with the masters' degree you do not necessarily know what a university teaches people. It doesn't necessarily teach all of that that is required for you to get your SPHR or PHR certification

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 discussed the results of the data collected during the one on one interviews with twenty executive HR participants. The research utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research method in which six primary themes were revealed: Educational Preparedness, Careers, Organizational Development Opportunities, Benefits of Membership in HR Professional Organizations, Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness, and Certification Perspectives. These six things were discussed and rich data from there lived experiences were given as a support for each theme. The themes and interpretations are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives prepare HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. This chapter discusses the data findings identified during this study and is divided into two sections. The first section describes and introduces the participants that were interviewed and reveals the summary of the data collected. The second section describes and reveals the primary themes that were identified in an attempt to understand whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives prepare HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of executive level HR professionals towards their formal education, organizational development and training programs, and their own self-development?

The question helped the researcher assess the ways in which today's HR executives perceive whether their training has given them the required skills needed for the role of business partner in today's organizations. The research question aided and helped to guide the researcher's open-ended interview questions in an effort to

understanding the essence of the HR executive's perceptions as it related to their formal education, their organizational development and training programs, and their own self-development.

Summary of the Research Study

Significance of the Study

There have been research and studies that validate that the role of an HR executive is evolving into a strategic, oriented-business partner to the organization's top management. Loshali and Krishnan (2013) articulated that the HR function role has changed a lot recently and HR professionals are seen more as business partners. It was also noted that HR professionals must assume the role of strategic partner in a proactive way to ensure effective alignment with the overall business goals.

Business organizations, executives, and HR professionals must understand the comprehensive development and growth activities imperative for HR professionals to overcome the challenges to succeed in the 21st century and bring higher value and productivity to organizations. Moss (2008) examined and articulated how business enterprises and HR executives benefit when organizations are intimately involved in the growth and development of their HR counterparts. Business organizations can be more proactive and involved in HR cross training and mentoring (Moss, 2008). Although this is a very important aspect in improving the HR competencies, it only focuses on one particular aspect.

This study included colleges and universities curriculum for a comprehensive approach to HR development. The study also considered whether HR executives are becoming more involved in their own professional growth, which includes HR

certifications and membership in various HR organizations. Lastly, it examined whether business organizations were being proactive in establishing cross training, mentoring, and sponsoring of workshops and seminars in the field of HR. This study was significant because it examined a comprehensive approach to HR development rather than focusing on one specific developmental activity.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on assessing a) HR executives' formal education, b) HR executive development and training in organizations, and c) HR executive self-development (HR executive's participation in professional organizations and HR certification). The literature review examined how the roles and expectations of HR professionals were shifting to a more strategic role in organizations and how colleges and universities and organizational development and training programs prepare HR executives to effectively function in their new roles. In addition, the literature assessed HR professionals' self-development in the areas of membership in HR professional organizations and their participation in HR certification.

The traditional HR functions of staffing, recruiting, compensation, and benefits are losing ground to a new generation of value added core HR functions. The growing role of an HR executive is becoming a strategically-oriented business partner of the organizations top managers (Rowden, 1999). Not only does the HR executive need to have the background and skill sets to establish an effective business partner relationship with top management, but the HR professional must be a fit for that organization. The HR fit is based on an organization's strategy and the HR professionals skill set. In other words, the competencies an HR leader needs is based on the company's strategy (Wright

and Snell, 1998). The framework of this study assessed in a comprehensive format how HR executives are being prepared to become strategic partners.

Methodology

The qualitative approach utilized in this study was a phenomenology perspective. A phenomenology research provides the study with a rich textured description of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009).

The specific phenomenological approach selected for this research was the hermeneutic phenomenological model, which utilizes the involvement of reading text and understands the meaning and intentions behind the references (Moustakas, 1994). Kafle (2011) also noted that hermeneutic phenomenology puts an effort to get beneath the subjective experience and find the genuine objective nature of the things as realized by an individual (p.186). In essence it is an attempt to understand the world as experienced by the participant.

The utilization of a hermeneutic phenomenological method was appropriate for this study because it helped to obtain a better understanding of the executive HR's perceptions about a) the quality of their formal education, b) their organization's HR development and training opportunities, c) their participation in HR Professional organizations, and d) their perceptions about obtaining a professional HR certification.

Utilizing this design helped the researcher gain deeper insight into the subjective experience of the HR professional and help the researcher find the genuine nature of things as experienced and realized by the participants (Kafle, 2011).

The hermeneutic phenomenological method helped the researcher better understand the texts and help to create a rich and deep account of the phenomenon (Kafle, 2011).

The phenomenological research study utilized a collection of data through an open-ended, one-on-one interview process. The one-on-one in-depth open-ended questions allowed the researcher to obtain descriptions of the experiences of the HR executives' perceptions as it related to their 1) formal education, 2) their organizations training and development opportunities, 3) their participation in HR organizations' and HR certification.

The Results

This section of the study discusses the results of the data that was collected through the researcher's one on one open ended interview questions with 20 HR executives from the local SHRM in Alabama. Utilizing the Moustakas' (1994) analysis steps, a) the researcher reads through the transcribed data and highlight significant statements, quotes, or sentences that helps the researcher understand how the participants variance the phenomena, b) then, the researcher develops clusters of meaning from the participants significant statements and quotes into themes, (c) the researcher writes descriptions of what the participants experienced utilizing their significant statements, d) the researcher also uses the significant statements to write a description of the context or setting that influences how the participants experience the phenomena, and e) the researcher writes a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon. Utilizing these five steps from Moustakas (1994) analysis steps, six themes were identified a) Educational Preparedness, b) Careers, c) Organizational Development

Opportunities, d) Benefits of Membership in Professional HR Organizations, e) Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness, and f) Certification Perspectives. This section focuses on the findings of the research study and discusses and examines the results individually theme by theme.

Theme 1. Educational Preparedness

The educational preparedness theme is closely aligned with the first part of the research question as it relates to what are the perceptions of executive level HR professionals toward their formal education? As noted earlier in the Literature Review, Kaufman (1999) acknowledged that early HR Management university curriculums were indoctrinated in economics, and then moved to a new emphasis, which was part of the psychology curriculum on employee relations. Recent information revealed that many HR programs in colleges and universities were gradually moving away from organizational behavior and industrial relations and were focusing more on business school curricula. Kaufman (1999) stated, “Courses in personnel or HR management are now found in nearly every university or college with some type of undergraduate or graduate business or management program” (p.107). In essence, many universities have dropped courses associated with industrial sociology and other social science courses in exchange for increased curricular in areas associated with business such as finance accounting and marketing (Way, 1996).

This study did not agree with the assessments of Kaufman (1999) and Way (1996) as they related to the colleges and universities undergraduate curriculum. However, the master’s level HR curriculum did agree with their assessment. The data collected showed that 13 (65%) of participants revealed their undergraduate degree helped to prepare them

for their current position. In addition, 10 participants (50%) revealed that their undergraduate degrees were also primarily strategically focused mainly due to their curriculum being more focused on the strategic and business aspects of an organization. However, when looking more closely at the only four participants who received an undergraduate HR degree, three (75% of those receiving an undergraduate degree in HR) revealed that their curriculum was still more in line with the administrative functions of HR. Only one (25% of those who received an undergraduate degree in HR) revealed that their curriculum was more strategically focused as suggested in the Literature Review. All 10 participants (100%) that achieved a master's level degree (seven of whom received a master's specifically in HR) and both participants (100%) who received their PhD in management revealed that their graduate degrees were primarily focused towards the strategic areas of business. In addition, the 10 participants that received a master's degree as part of their educational achievements nine participants (90%) revealed that their master's level degree played a great role in preparing them for their current position.

In summary of this theme the results demonstrate that the perception of HR executives is colleges and universities still require improvement to undergraduate HR curriculums into becoming more strategic and business based. However, the results also show that the graduate level HR curriculums have greatly improved and have been more targeted towards instilling a more strategic focus curriculum to prospective HR professionals.

Theme 2. Careers

The data collected during this theme shows the participants strategic involvement in their current positions. Lawler, Boudreau, and Mohrman (2006) revealed that a new emphasis in major corporations was geared toward incorporating more value added functions within human resources. The focus of the HR function was becoming more in line with business consulting and the managing of the organization's core competencies. Rowden (1999) states,

the new business context is prompting management to take greater interests in the utilization of their organizations human resources. Because of this, the human resource function is playing a far more significant role in corporate strategic planning than ever before. Today, company executives are increasingly looking to HR to improve the bottom line.

As it relates to HR executives being more involved in strategic aspects of their respective organizations four participants (20%) identified that their current position was at least 70% strategic. Four participants (20%) also identified that their current position was at least 50% strategic, which they revealed as being balanced. One participant (5%) revealed 60% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 80% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 95% strategic, which was the highest percent recorded, one participant (5%) revealed 90% strategic, one participant (5%) revealed 85% strategic, and one participant (5%) revealed 40% strategic, which was the only participant who strategic involvement in their current position was reported as below 50%. In addition, there were six participants (30%) who did not reveal a particular percentage rate. However, they articulated that their current position was primarily strategic. In essence, the results show that 18 participants (90%) reported that their strategic involvement in the organization is at least 50% of their job activities. Fourteen participants (70%) stated they were members

of the organization's strategic leadership team and seven participants (35%) revealed they were the first HR members to be part of the strategic leadership team. Therefore, the data reveals that 50% of the participants who identified themselves as strategic members of management are the first HR professionals in their organization to be a member of the strategic leadership team.

In summary the results show a clear correlation with Lawler, Boudreau and Mohrman (2006) that revealed a new emphasis in major corporations are being geared toward incorporating more value added functions within human resources. Rowden's (1999) assessment that an organization's new business contacts prompt management to take greater interest in the utilization of human resources, and that function will play a more significant role in corporate strategic planning. Fourteen participants (70%) reported that they were now members of the organizational strategic team and seven participants (35%) revealed that they were the first HR members to be part of their organization's strategic team was a strong indication that organizations are incorporating HR in a more strategic role.

Theme 3. Organizational Development Opportunities

The data collected during this theme highlighted what development and training opportunities were available to today's HR professionals. The participants interviewed provided vast and varying examples of what today's organizations are doing to enhance HR executive's competencies and business skill sets. Sixteen participants (80%) articulated that their organizations supplied leadership and development training for the HR executives. This information corresponds with the information gathered in the study's literature review. Baill (1999) highlighted the importance of organizations developing

training and development programs to ensure in the development of a well-rounded HR professional, and how other companies such as General Electric, IBM, and Arthur Andersen are viewed as industry leaders as it relates to the development of their HR professionals. GE utilizes a Human Resource Leadership Program.

Today's organizations seem to be moving in the direction of providing leadership and business acumen training to their executive level HR professionals. For example, participant Bobby revealed that his organization was interested in recognizing the importance of developing the skill sets of HR individuals. They provided organized in-house training as well as external training facilitated by outside consultants. Participant Brandy stated, "I've been very fortunate that I worked for organizations that provided some great workforce development so for me from a HR's perspective I have had companies that let me say this is what I need and they paid for it." Participant Darlene revealed her organization has specialized development training for executive level managers of the organization which she is a part.

In addition to leadership training, 17 participants, (85%) identified course type training. Eighteen participants (90%) revealed training seminars, 16 participants identified (80%) workshops, seven participants (35%) identified mentoring programs, six participants (30%) identified cross training, and eight participants (40%) articulated they were able to decide on their own training program. In addition, three participants (15%) revealed their organizations paid for their formal education. The results gathered during this study revealed a correlation of today's organization with the current literature review, which suggests that organizations need to get HR professionals leadership skills early in their careers and give them an opportunity for cross functional training assignments

throughout their career. The literature also suggested obtaining mentors from HR as well as various other areas of the organization.

In summary, in today's organizations, development opportunities are more prevalent than they have been in the past. HR executives observe a greater focus on organizations deliberately incorporating development and leadership training to ensure the HR professional is better equipped to function as strategic partner.

Theme 4. Benefits of Membership in HR Professional Organizations

The data collected during this theme revealed what benefits the participants perceived as being beneficial by becoming a member of a professional HR organization. This theme also correlated to the research question as it related to HR self-development. A 2008 article, "Career Development: Degrees of Learning," revealed HR professionals can become more proactive in improving their knowledge and competencies in a number of ways. The article stated, "The most important aspect is not how we gain additional knowledge and competencies, but whether or not we are searching for ways to increase our knowledge and competencies."

It is not only important for HR professionals to increase their knowledge; it is equally important for HR professionals to make themselves known to their peers. The data results revealed that membership in a HR professional organization is a great way for them to make themselves known to their peers. Seventeen participants (85%) revealed that participation in an HR professional organization gave them the opportunity to network; in essence, giving them an opportunity to make themselves known to their peers. In addition, 11 participants (55%) acknowledged also having an opportunity to build relationships with other HR professionals was seen as a benefit. The participants

revealed several benefits as it related to networking and building relationships. For example, Bobby stated, “I think it’s important that those who have a body of knowledge and expertise shared that with development of the HR profession and those in the community.” Participant Brandy articulated,

I enjoy participating in networking organizations because you are able to network and interact with people there who have similar backgrounds but sometimes they have totally different skills and experiences that help you with the issue that you’re currently working on and vice versa.

Participant Carver revealed he believed belonging to a professional organization was a good thing for any HR professional. He stated, “I think it’s good for networking, it’s good for staying current on things, and you meet a lot of folk out there.” Participant David believed it’s imperative to become part of a professional organization. He stated, “We have to, if you are really dedicated and you want to progress as a professional. You have to be part of a professional organization.”

Participants also highlighted other major benefits associated with becoming members of a professional HR organization. Thirteen participants (65%) highlighted professional resources were belonging to a professional organization. Four participants (20%) identified possible job opportunities may become available due to their participation in a professional organization. In addition, Queene revealed she thought it was absolutely necessary to become part of an HR professional organization because they keep HR professionals abreast of changes in the field. Participant Jaws explains it’s almost necessary for an HR professional to be part of a professional organization. It gives them exposure to how other people handle problems they encounter or could be faced with in the future.

In summary, the participant's results revealed it's an integral part in a HR's self-development to become part of a professional HR organization. There have been many benefits associated with becoming a member such as networking, professional resources, building relationships, job opportunities, and positive perceptions in the professional community. All 20 participants (100%) of the associates belonged to an HR professional organization. In addition, 10 participants (50%) also belong to other various professional organizations.

Theme 5. Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness

The data collection and results during this theme revealed how effective HR professionals viewed their local professional HR organization as well as the national HR organization. In addition, participants articulated their perceptions on the local HR organizations effectiveness of facilitating strategic training for upper-level HR executives.

The literature review explained that the development of HR professionals must be aligned with the new skills and competencies needed in the 21st century. Traditional HR roles of staffing, recruiting, compensation, insurance claims administration, employee assistance programs, the 401(k) plan administration, dependent care assistance, and other non-value added functions are being outsourced by many companies in an effort to become more competitive (Rowden, 1999). This allows HR to move from administrative support to a strategic business partner. Many of the participants perceived that the local HR organization is very good at preparing entry-level and mid-level HR professionals for the traditional HR roles including staffing, recruiting, compensation, benefits, and other administrative roles. However, they fail in assisting upper-level HR executives in

improving their business acumen competencies and helping them to move from administrative to a strategic business partner. Five participants (25%) articulated that the organizations can be more effective if they facilitated more strategic training for HR professionals. Seven participants (35%) believed the organization can be more effective for upper-level HR executives by instituting training and leadership courses designed for the executive level HR professional. For example, participant Darlene felt very passionately about how local SHRM could be more effective for HR professionals. She stated, “They should have more emphasis placed on strategic HR and have more strategic speakers available.” In addition, she would like for the local organization to design a program or course that would assist senior level HR professionals in acquiring the skills they need to become strategic partners in their individual organizations. Senior level HR executives not only need to know the competencies associated with being a strategic partner, they also need the ability to sell themselves and show their value from an HR perspective. Participant Julia explained during her early HR career that she valued her membership in the local SHRM chapter. It was very beneficial to her growth as an HR professional. However, during that time, the local SHRM’s training was more geared toward the administrative functions of the HR profession. For her, at that time, it was really helpful. As she moved up in her career, she found the local SHRM to be less beneficial. She stated,

The local SHRM has helped you a lot when you were going through your career and helping you better understand all the administrative tools and the administrative things that you have to do, but once you got into a strategic role it was less helpful.

The study also revealed that executive level HR professionals also spend limited face time at the local HR professional organizations meetings and conferences due to two main reasons. First, the executive HR level professionals do not feel that the training and development programs within the organization are geared toward strategic management or upper-level HR executive competencies. Second, due to the increased time constraints of their now executive roles, they articulated they have less time to participate. However, they feel they may find more time to participate if they viewed the meetings and training as being more beneficial to their current responsibilities.

In summary, the HR professional organizations have played a valuable role in preparing HR professionals for various roles and responsibilities within the HR profession. However, as HR professional's careers grow, the training they receive are still more closely aligned to the administrative aspects of HR. The HR professional organizations must move with the times of the new HR paradigm and incorporate more strategic planning and leadership skills within his curriculum to maintain the interest of upper-level HR professionals.

Theme 6 Certification Perspectives

The data collection for this theme reveals the perspectives of HR executives as it relates to HR professional certifications. In addition, it reveals their preferences or perceptions regarding hiring a potential HR professional who possesses a Master's in Human Resource Management versus a HR professional who has acquired a Senior Professional in Human Resources certification (SPHR).

The literature review revealed how individuals and organizations perceive the benefits of HR certification. Wiley (1995) stated, "Professional certification has many

benefits and drawbacks” (p. 280). The benefit of certification from an individual perspective is that certification requires an individual to demonstrate individual knowledge and abilities in the field, and in doing so, it forces an individual to prepare and study to exemplify their mastery of a body of knowledge. It also helps to establish public recognition for an individual, an increase in pay in many organizations, career advancement, and helps to instill a more professional attitude within a candidate. Sustaining or becoming eligible for HR recertification encourages individuals to keep up with the body of knowledge and the changes within the profession. Wiley (1995) articulated the draw backs of HR in his data from 91 firms that found HR professionals need competencies in three main areas of the business a) human resources, b) business capabilities, and c) managing change. The HR certification does not stress competencies in business capabilities or managing change.

Consumers and employers see certification as a mark of high performance. An (“HR Certification: More in Demand by Employers,”2008) article also articulated that certified HR professionals were more in demand by employers. The article stated,

One in two HR professionals say that hiring managers consider certification status when making interview or hiring decisions about HR department positions, according to Value of Certification Survey conducted by the HR certification Institute. (p 9)

Many executives believe hiring HR certified candidates gives their organization a competitive advantage. Aguinis, Michaelis, and Jones (2005) stated, “Earning certification in a particular field usually sends a signal to potential employers that an individual has mastered a specific body of knowledge.”

The result of the study directly correlate with the information revealed in the study's literature review. Seventeen participants (85%) have acquired a professional HR certification. In addition, 85% of the participants also revealed they believe a HR certification helps get a potential HR candidate in the door. In general, the executive level HR professionals have a positive perception of the certification process. For example, participant Carver expressed that just preparing for the certification is beneficial to an HR professional. He has encouraged his HR employees no matter their position prepare for and take the HR certification designation. Participant Darlene stated,

I think that the HR certification is kind of like a college degree, it proves that you have the ability to think and understand concepts and philosophies and it also embraces that you have a body of knowledge that you know about HR.

Participant David is very passionate concerning HR professionals obtaining their HR certification. David stated,

Got to have them. I mean how you can present yourself as a professional when you have no certifications. How can you get up and teach a class or lead a group? How can you do something like that you have no certifications, what gives you the right.

Participant Sam stated, "I think every HR professional needs to have it, because it separates you, it separates somebody that's truly interested in his profession and interested in his career development." Participant Susan is a great proponent of HR certifications. She encourages her entire HR staff to achieve their certification requirements. She believes in every profession there some sort of certifications that highlights this person has done a little bit more than what was required and have a greater level of expertise. She thinks certification is a valuable asset for any HR professional.

The study also revealed other positive perceptions associated with the benefits of obtaining a professional HR certification. Other benefits include certified HR professionals perceived as being better prepared, and they are learned in their field. In addition, several HR executives believe just preparing for the exam whether pass or fail helps the HR professional to acquire more knowledge in the field.

The study also revealed how the participants would respond when evaluating two prospective HR candidates where one candidate has completed a Master's in Human Resource Management, but had not acquired a Senior Professional in Human Resource Management certification (SPHR) and another candidate has acquired a SPHR but has not completed a master's level curriculum. (This situation was based on resume and experience being equal). Of the 15 who responded to the scenario eight participants (53%) revealed they would choose the candidate whom successfully completed their SPHR certification and seven participants (47%) revealed they would choose the master's degree candidate.

In summary, the results reveal the HR executives perceived the acquiring of a HR certification as very beneficial and important to a HR professional's career. HR executives see certification as a mark of high performance and are now definitely in demand more than ever. Although, a master's level degree generally takes at least two years to complete and costs several thousand dollars when compared to a SPHR certification, which only takes a short time to complete with the cost of only a few hundred dollars; over 50% of the participants still viewed the HR certification as equal to or more credible than a master's level degree in HR. This result illustrates how much credibility the HR executives have perceived in the importance of HR certification.

Discussion

The research also revealed other interesting results—the vast majority of the HR executives interviewed did not receive their undergraduate with a HR concentration. In addition, it also revealed that the vast majority of the participants did not start a career in human resources. Some explained they either fell into or accidentally got into the HR field. These results infer that many HR professionals did not consciously make an effort to explore the HR field prior to their formal education or professional work experience.

The HR executives were also revealing in how, throughout their careers, they have seen the transition of HR moving from a more administrative focus to a more strategic focus in the organizations in which they have worked. Many revealed that just a few years ago they would've viewed their jobs as being more administratively focused, however their jobs today are primarily more strategic based due to the shift in their organizations HR focus and perceptions. Many HR executives interviewed were the first HR executives in their organizations to be part of the organization's strategic management team. This was not necessarily because their organizations randomly saw the value in human resources; it was primarily due to the proactive approach taken by the current HR professionals. The organizations first saw value utilizing the HR executive as a strategic partner before they first saw the benefit in incorporating HR as part of their organizations strategic partners. This could be viewed as the passionate motivated HR executives are playing a role in changing the perceptions of the value of a qualified HR professional. This aligns with the literature review where Kiger (2008) reported that failure to recognize human resources strategic potential put organizations at a serious disadvantage. The research results revealed many organizations are now becoming more

proactive in ensuring HR executives are exposed to more strategic and leadership development than in the recent past.

The HR executives interviewed were very proactive and motivated, ensuring their own professional development. Membership in a professional organization and the ability to network and obtain additional professional resources were seen as essential to their growth as an HR professional. In addition, the acquiring of a professional certification was also seen as a valuable asset in their growth as an HR professional. The study results reveal it takes a comprehensive approach from the educational institutions, business organizations, and the HR professionals themselves to improve the strategic competencies and business acumen of today's HR professionals.

Limitations

A qualitative method was used during this research in which several limitations were identified. The first limitation was the use of only executive level HR executives. The results from this research study are only from the perception of the upper-level HR professionals within an organization. This allowed the research viewpoint to only be seen from the upper levels of HR. The utilization of entry-level or mid-level HR professionals may have resulted in a different outcome.

The second identified limitation was that the research did not attempt to solicit input from managers outside of the HR function. The research fails to identify whether managers from other areas of the organization viewed or perceived the information within the study as their counterpart HR executives.

The third limitation identified was that all the participants were from Alabama. In addition, all of the participants were also from within the same HR professional

organization. The transferability of the study may be affected by limiting the participants from within the same regional area as well as within the same professional HR organization.

The fourth limitation identified was the researcher did not utilize member checking from the participants. Although the information was transcribed from an audio recorder for accuracy, participants did not verify the transcripts.

Lastly the research had a limitation with the number of HR executives that were interviewed. There were 20 HR professionals interviewed for this research study. The limited number of HR professionals interviewed could also impact study's transferability as it relates to other HR professionals within the country.

Recommendations for Future Research

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was designed in an effort to gather pertinent information of the perceptions of the 21st century executive HR's perceptions on their formal education, their organization's HR development programs, and their own HR professional self-development, which included their participation in HR professional organizations and their perceptions of professional HR certifications.

The research study could be performed utilizing executive leaders from other areas of the organization to compare the results of both HR executives and executives from other areas within the organization. The results could be analyzed to see if there is any congruency between the perceptions of both HR executives and other business leaders.

The research in this study was comprised exclusively of HR executives from the Alabama. This research could be done in other areas of the country. Additional research

in other areas could identify if the findings were generalized in Alabama or if the findings are consistent with HR executives throughout the country.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether colleges and universities, business organizations, and HR executives prepared HR executives with the proper strategic and business skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. The primary research question was What are the perceptions of executive level HR professionals towards their formal education, organizations development and training programs, and their own self-development? Six themes were identified in the findings: a) Educational Preparedness, b) Careers, c) Organizational Development Opportunities, d) Benefits of Membership in Professional HR Organizations, e) Professional HR Organizations Effectiveness, and f) Certification Perspectives. The study revealed that human resources is being revamped not only within college and university curriculum, but also within business organizations themselves to include more training, which complements the business and strategic roles of the new HR professional. In addition, it highlights a perception that HR professional organizations needs to improve their strategic and leadership training for upper-level HR executives. The study also revealed that HR executives have a positive perception as it relates to professional HR certifications.

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APPENDIX A. STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL WORK

Academic Honesty Policy

Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) holds learners accountable for the integrity of work they submit, which includes but is not limited to discussion postings, assignments, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation or capstone project.

Established in the Policy are the expectations for original work, rationale for the policy, definition of terms that pertain to academic honesty and original work, and disciplinary consequences of academic dishonesty. Also stated in the Policy is the expectation that learners will follow APA rules for citing another person's ideas or works.

The following standards for original work and definition of *plagiarism* are discussed in the Policy:

Learners are expected to be the sole authors of their work and to acknowledge the authorship of others' work through proper citation and reference. Use of another person's ideas, including another learner's, without proper reference or citation constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty and is prohibited conduct. (p. 1)

Plagiarism is one example of academic dishonesty. Plagiarism is presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own. Plagiarism also includes copying verbatim or rephrasing ideas without properly acknowledging the source by author, date, and publication medium. (p. 2)

Capella University's Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)) holds learners accountable for research integrity. What constitutes research misconduct is discussed in the Policy:

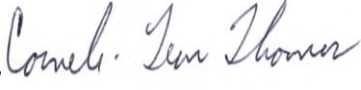
Research misconduct includes but is not limited to falsification, fabrication, plagiarism, misappropriation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the academic community for proposing, conducting, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. (p. 1)

Learners failing to abide by these policies are subject to consequences, including but not limited to dismissal or revocation of the degree.

Statement of Original Work and Signature

I have read, understood, and abided by Capella University's Academic Honesty Policy ([3.01.01](#)) and Research Misconduct Policy ([3.03.06](#)), including the Policy Statements, Rationale, and Definitions.

I attest that this dissertation or capstone project is my own work. Where I have used the ideas or words of others, I have paraphrased, summarized, or used direct quotes following the guidelines set forth in the *APA Publication Manual*.

Learner name and date	<u>Cornelius Leon Thomas/  8-19-2015</u>
Mentor name and school	<u>Dr. Theresa Pavone/ School of Business and Technology</u>